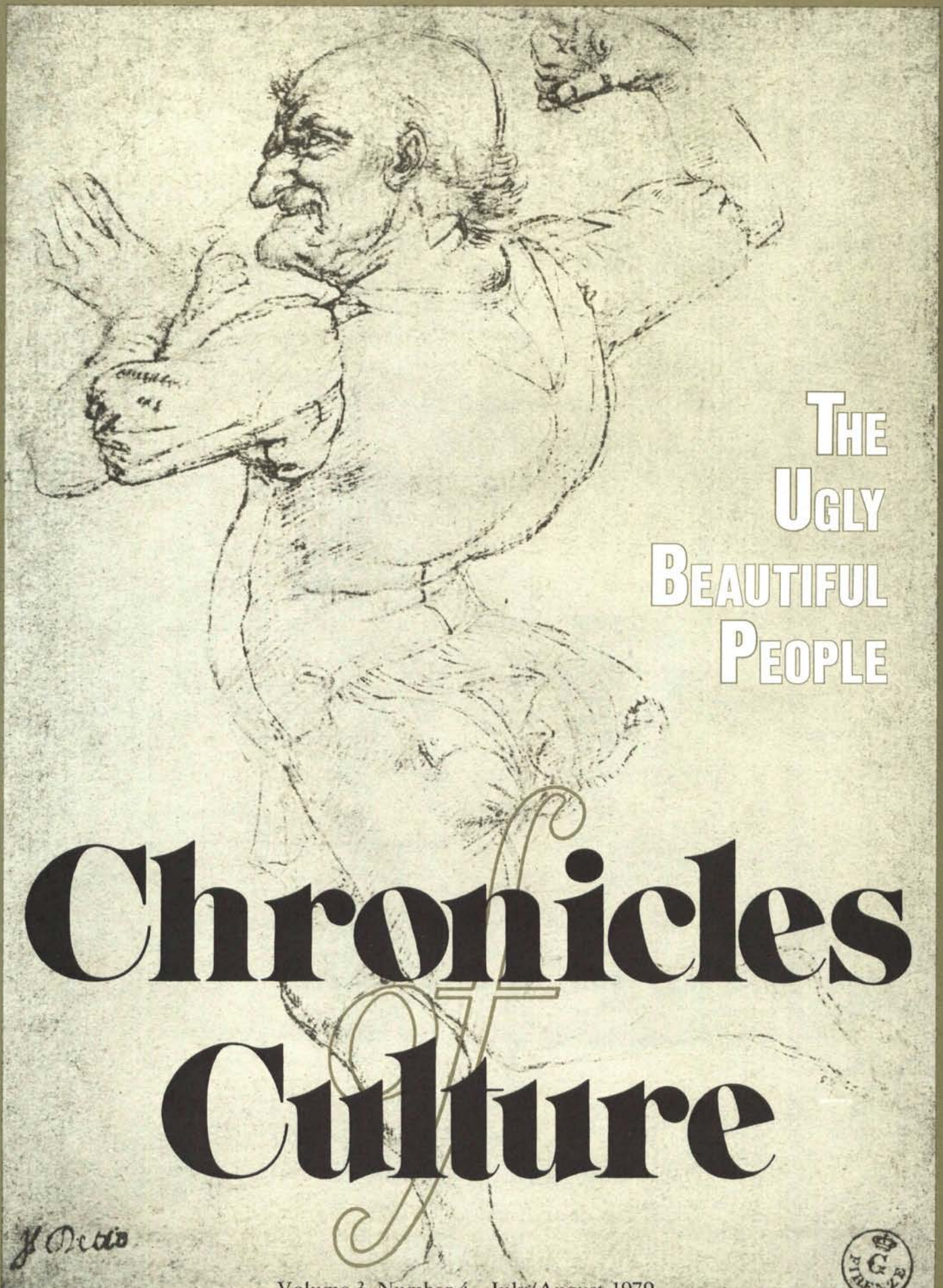

THE UGLY BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Chronicles of Culture

Volume 3, Number 4 July/August 1979

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

4 Editor's Comment — Leopold Tyrmand

Opinions & Views

6 *Scènes de la Vie* in *Province* — Leo F. Raditsa
—Susan Sontag: *I etcetera; On Photography; Illness as Metaphor*

8 Bad Manners as Genius — Lev Navrozov
—Richard Price: *Ladies' Man*

11 Culture Parasites (and Others Who Still Try to Ask Questions) — Thomas Molnar
—Theodore Roszak: *Person/Planet*
Robert Jastrow: *God and the Astronomers*

14 Guide to an Alternate World — Alan J. Levine
—Benjamin Stein: *The View from Sunset Boulevard*

16 Void Camouflaged by Vocabulary — Whit Stillman
—John Updike: *The Coup*

18 How to Wreck a Ruin — David Pietrusza
—Jack Newfield and Paul DuBrul: *The Abuse of Power*

20 Anticolonialism of a Liberated Leftist — Paul Gottfried
—James Morris: *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat*

21 A Valid Defense of the Indefensible — Christopher Manion
—Michael Novak: *The Guns of Lattimer; The American Vision*

23 Struggling for One's Own Child's Mind — Mahmood Butt
—Connaught Coyne Marshner: *Blackboard Tyranny*

Commendables

24 Our Serious Past: *Philadelphia Merchant*
Simple but Complex Verities: *On Human Nature*

In Focus

25 A Fashionable Steel-and-Glass Jacobin Club — Kenneth Kolson
—Daniel Patrick Moynihan with Suzanne Weaver: *A Dangerous Place*

Waste of Money

26 Halberstam's Wow! Gee!: *The Powers That Be*
Delbanco's Strange Dullness: *Sherbrookes*
The Abnormalcy Obsession: *Little Lives*

27 Nossiter's Veto: *Britain—A Future that Works*

Screen

27 Serious Art — Eric Shapearo
—*The Deer Hunter*

Music

29 The Delicate Giant of the Clarinet — Craig Wyatt
—Tom Bethell: *George Lewis: A Jazzman from New Orleans*

The American Scene

30 Polish & Irish Jokes—Ideological Center that Would Hold

31 Mrs. Shaw

Journalism

31 The Latest Calamity
New York Times' Impartiality

32 *Time's* Pharisaism (Cont.)

Liberal Culture

33 Progress and Reaction

Vol. 3, No. 1, January/February 1979
Accentuate the Negative

Vol. 3, No. 2, March/April 1979
On Conscience & Related Concerns

Vol. 3, No. 3, May/June 1979
The Oldest Conflict

Tyrmand: Editor's Comment; Levine on Lewy (*America in Vietnam*); Schwartz on Webb (*Fields of Fire*); Walsh on Simmons (*Wrinkles*); Scott on Wouk (*The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*); Navrozov on Cate (*The Ides of August*); Kolson on Gilder (*Visible Man*); Ehrenkrantz on Charyn (*Secret Isaac*); Commendables; In Focus; Screen; Music; The American Scene; Jouralism; Liberal Culture; Polemics & Exchanges.

Erratum

In the previous issue of *Chronicles of Culture* the *Screen* section, entitled "So—What's New?" was written by Eric Shapearo, whose name was omitted due to an editorial error.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chronicles of Culture

Volume 3, Number 4 July/August 1979

THE UGLY BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Chronicles of Culture is published bimonthly by the Rockford College Institute, 5050 East State Street, Rockford, Illinois, 61101; Director: John Howard; Editor: Leopold Tyrmand; Publishing Manager: Richard A. Vaughan; Editorial Assistant: Becki Klute; Printed by Wilson-Hall Co.; Cover: "A Caricature" by Pieter Breughel (1520?-1569), from The MacLeish Collection, The Rare Print Cabinet, Rockford College Library; Original vignette by Warren Chappell.

ISSN: 1063-1187

The opinions expressed in the publications of the Rockford College Institute do not necessarily reflect the policies or judgments of Rockford College.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor's Comment

Today, the ugly beautiful people have become an ideological occurrence. When Governor Brown semi-officially travels abroad with sexual service personnel in lieu of a spouse, this is not nonconformism but an ideological statement. It is calculated to attract favor from trendsetters whom he deems more important than ordinary constituents. A very private aide to a governor is nothing new in history or politics. Intense publicity for less traditional proclivities of a politician is new. It takes into account that America is divided into two cultures, each living by its own principles and styles. But only one is hailed by the monopolistic liberal media as progressive and wholesome—the normless and amorphous ethos of the Manhattan-Malibu axis. And Governor Brown is banking on its electoral power.

Every society has an effluvium, but effluvia, even the most noxious ones, rarely become socio-ethical problems. They have in today's America. The *lumpen* is now called an underclass, seen as a source of morality; the *canaille* has gone through a beatification process and now has its saints, like Genêt, and pious apologists, like film director Robert Altman. The ugly beautiful people, the American effluvium, once even aimed at becoming an elite, but the sheer force of numbers (a result of American affluence) has expanded them into another underclass.

Historically, elites have always been formed through a concentration of either political or financial power that rarefied itself into a social standing; attempts to form elites on the basis of moral or civic virtues, sadly, have seldom succeeded. However, in the past, elites as a rule tried to work out a virtuous image: the aristocratic ethics of honor and protectiveness, or the bourgeois morality of industriousness and economic plenty were socially and culturally functional. Rectitude was always a vital factor in their ideologies, even if it had to be propounded at the price of hypocrisy. The lower classes—for whom love, family and personal honesty were accessible moral values—had the official aristocratic propaganda of decorum and the bourgeois propaganda of decency for tangible supports in gathering the existential assets of life, work, traditions. Providing well-defined values, even if they were not always implemented in practice, accounted for the health and success of Western civilization. It determined its universal mission.

Today, the ugly beautiful people's pretense of an elite results from the fusion of technology and culture. Deprived of philosophy and faith, they use cultural bric-a-brac—lifestyles, fashion, pop art—as their spiritual identification and dialectics. With their moral stimuli in a condition of atrophy, they couldn't survive without the support of the press, electronic communications, movies, TV. In fact, their only recognizable tenet: "Fun *Is* Morality," ethically and socially repulsive as it is, serves as fuel for the sensationalist media.

Their social bases are nonproductive professions that enrich neither society nor culture, only decorate them. Each civilization in history had its milieu of drones, parasites and spongers, whose group rationale was the "embellishment" of drab reality. In the past, those groups elicited little more than amused contempt from their contemporaries. In today's America, this "embellishment" has become an irrationally respected and absurdly lucrative economic and social function, if not a profession. This makes the ugly beautiful people thirsty for outright social power, which they actually are close to attaining through various interactions with and feedbacks from authentic elites.

Every profession contributes something to the overall performance of a highly specialized economy. However, the production of entertainment, false eyelashes and neckties is not of the same contributory import as bread, coal and light bulbs. A free market economy is supposed to pay for what's in demand. Yet, at some point, generating an artificial demand for shoddiness and trash, and pushing up financial rewards for utterly reprehensible services, became the mainstays of nonproductive professions. The overpayment for effluvial "embellishment" is slowly emerging as the lethal mistake of our civilization. A mood has been created, no doubt detrimental to our interests as a whole, in which a fashion designer or rock impresario is anomalously entitled to be better off than someone who produces knowledge or enlightened attitudes, or an educator who exerts himself to improve human conduct. This juxtaposition of facts is slowly turning into a social caricature. A successful entertainer is paid grotesquely more than a nurse, although the latter is infinitely more morally and socially worthy. In the ugly beautiful people's dialectic this is explained by "talent" as a marketable value, but a talent to entertain in healthier societies was considered a private quality and usually dispensed for free. It's only been since technology began its woeful interaction with the production of culture that the bloodsucking careers of singing stars, literary agents, dope theorists, professional freaks, acting hacks, publicity stuntmen, have invaded the parasitic fringe of the vocational idlers, turned them into an underclass, and with the help of the corrupted media promoted the ugly beautiful folklore into an all-American exemplar. The "embellishment" rationalization has been expanded into a *Weltanschauung,* ugly, miscreated and foul as it is, but relentlessly promoted and—what's ominous—economically profitable. It subsists on psychoanalytical twaddle which makes platitudes into "wisdom" that legislates existences and emotions. It creates a pseudo-intellectual climate in which the pop-art mass magazine critics, the current spiritual leadership, anoint "greatness" and are paid out of all reasonable proportion to their social value. Why perfunctory and embarrassingly shallow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

journalistic renditions of history, contemporary affairs, behavioral issues and artistic creativity time and again have become multimillion dollar enterprises is a crucial question. The answer probably is: Because the greedy and unscrupulous liberal publisher strikes an alliance with the liberal media manipulator, and together they set out to boost at any price a conformist liberal critic, or a liberal intellectual bigot, thereby forming the most formidable sociocultural device of our time. They all frequent the same leisure circuit; at their cocktail parties and carefully crafted cultural events, the gathering and inbreeding of mutual supportiveness is taking place. Next morning, it passes into publishing and editorial offices, or movie studios, and the warped liberal ideals get blended with journalistic hype and with a communication system that feeds and thrives on everything value-free, offbeat, far-out. Opinion making for the mere sake of opinion making has become a tremendous, all-encompassing industry.

In such a climate, inversion and perversion of sociocultural meanings becomes both a basic instrument of "change" and a source of unholy profits. The acting profession, for one, though certainly an artistic skill, was never held in high esteem in refined civilizations: actors made their living by impersonating other people, somehow an offense to the Judeo-Christian sense of God-given human properties. Among the ugly beautiful people, actors equal ancient prophets. But not only has the actor's role been blown out of proportion, the entire mechanism of culture has been corrupted.

For over six decades, Hollywood mirrored the character and dreams of the nation. It did it in a garish way, and was called the cradle of a vibrant and folksy art. Simple-mindedness and tinsel, always Hollywood's image, did not prevent it from capturing some essential truths about America, which commanded the attention and sentiments of the world at large. During the '60s, Hollywood was put on another course, hailed as "creative" and "introspective" by liberal elites. Movies began to reflect the marginal rather than the essential, aberrations of reality rather than reality itself. Instead of dreams, we were offered nightmares which were declared self-questioning insights. To claim that *The Exorcist, Jaws* or *A Wedding* represent anything but the sleazy periphery of truth is not only a fraud, but also the main factor in Hollywood's degeneration to the repulsiveness of a jaded stripteaser whose only ambition is to shock and to make money. This fundamental change in creative trends has had many consequences: among them, some new ways have materialized for the celebrity elites to live, love and influence the cultural aura of the country.

The ugly beautifuls are on the uppermost end of the affluence scale, but their political orientation is intensely radical and leftish. This has something to do with the present marketability of leftism, radical chic, and other demonstrable clichés; it can be safely assumed that any political extremism of any totalitarian brand would be warmly embraced by them, provided its meretriciousness would supply maximum visibility. The owner of a prosperous Manhattan disco, who obviously culls his astronomic income from pimpish instincts, declared to awed reporters that he was "against Vietnam" and "would never go." The central ideological and theoretical organ of the ugly beautifuls, *Women's Wear Daily,* frantically promotes penthouse radicalism and overtly communist pop singers and "poets," goes into raptures at any modish cause, rally, etc. It also attempts to rationalize its stance: normlessness and dissipation of values are presented in its pages as a fight against hypocrisy, constriction, convention. A fabulously rich film director unveils his proclivity to stealing and touts it as "moral" impulse: "I like robbers . . . they are some of the finest people I ever met," he crows, and *WWD* reports it with pride.

It has already become clear that, in spite of all liberal media efforts, there's an unbridgeable rift between the common people and the ugly beautiful people of America. In fact, the latter are the former's openly declared enemy. Two kinds of money earned by two kinds of people have obvious civilizational consequences: those who provide food, electricity and transportation are pitched against the producers of news, entertainment, pop art and distorted liberal ideas. The ugly beautiful people are the focus of contention: the first loathe them, the second not only tolerate them but permit them to act as their legitimate elite. The first still think that patriotism and the Boy Scouts are good things; the second reject anticommunism, falsely present themselves as underdogs fighting on the side of other underdogs from their Beverly Hills mansions, and serve cocaine at their parties in the name of sacred solidarity with the oppressed. Being recklessly pushed by the media as the paradigm of American success, these ugly, mean, cynical, most often brainless people, who made it into the spotlight, ultimately ruin the common man's social chance to live better. As the alliance between the ugly beautifuls and the peddlers of Liberal Culture perennially needs an enemy on whom it can prey and structure its power of vilification, the producer of energy and housing becomes its natural victim. He is unable to create a fashionable cultural image; deprived of cultural weapons, his defenselessness becomes an easy source of money and fame for the liberal ugly beautiful predator. His intentions are smartly defamed, his preferences become the new American demonology. Cultural con men lavishly live off his denunciation. He has little social power and only some vestiges of political power. (Nothing exemplifies this better than the recent "memoirs" of Margaret Trudeau; when we realize that her lover during her marriage to the prime minister of Canada was the owner of Club Mediter-

continued on page 35

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Scènes de la Vie in *Province*

Susan Sontag: *I etcetera;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York. *On Photography;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York. *Illness as Metaphor;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Leo F. Raditsa

Miss Sontag lives off her talent the way some of the rich live off their capital—because they fear the pleasure, and the responsibility, of work and learning. She takes important things for granted and makes a fuss over unimportant things—like everyday photographs or wayward remarks about death-dealing disease. She leaves important matters undiscussed, because she assumes we agree about them, when actually she is afraid of changing her mind and facing her mistakes. She is half-educated, a true product of American education with passing acquaintance with many novels and an undergraduate reading of Plato still in her head unchanging and not about to change. She surrounds herself with words and things and, I bet, people who will not challenge her assumptions. She feeds the hunger for intelligence by teasing it with superficial brilliance. She parodies academic method, but does not know she is parodying it, at a moment when, alas, with some exceptions it is beyond parody. She wastes herself and others.

Caught without clear experience of either philosophy or history, Sontag tries to learn both philosophy and history from novels—not even from poets who are more demanding and do not lend themselves to the easy generalizations she takes for knowledge. She yearns for philosophy but will not dare be true to her yearning—and appeals to people who also yearn for philosophy but do not know it. This makes her a patsy for political propaganda, which substitutes for conviction and for the uneasy sense that one does not know enough to judge. She is pernicious, because she confirms people in their inadequacies, because she tries to convince her readers that their inadequacies are all in the world we have.

Of these books, *On Photography* is more worthy of comment, although it is deeply flawed. Photographs fascinate Sontag in a way the other things, like illness, she writes of do not. In this book she comes closest to a real subject, to something she cares about—but she evades it—with categorical judgments and haste.

What she really wants to talk about is seeing, but somehow she does not find her way to her real subject. As a result she denies her subject: she argues that it makes little sense to distinguish between photographers who can actually see and those who photograph because they cannot see. She will not, in the end, distinguish between photographers like Walker Evans and Edward Weston who can see—and the hundreds of others who cannot. She will not make judgments of value.

Photography, which looks so easy because its techniques are quickly mastered, is actually a demanding and limited art. It requires narrower discipline than any other art. As Paul Goodman used to say of the movies, it is good for two things only: documentary and dreaming.

Evans used to limit himself as severely as a symbolist poet. I saw that vividly when he criticized a piece of my prose when I was about nineteen. He went over every word and phrase with a care I had never imagined lived. Through all that severity I had the unmistakable impression that this was how he saw and photographed: that he was teaching me to give words the regard he took to the world and the discipline he gave to his camera. He was severe, but it was a severity full of warmth, not of cruelty. As a result it awakened awe in me: I had never before sensed the delicacy that came with the strength of words. There was, too, a lot of unnecessary fastidiousness that, I think, came from his refusal to yield to the facility of cameras. He was careful, almost fearful, in his struggle to make the camera serve his eyes—not his eyes the camera. His eyes were full of sight—of delight, joy and wit.

Because Sontag argues that photography is not an art, she is careless in her aesthetic judgments. She takes Weston's nudes much too much for granted—and this at a time when few if any painters, for whom it is a vastly easier subject, can paint a nude! She is also too uncritical in her praise of Robert Frank's photographs.

Twenty years ago, with the publication of *The Americans,* Frank's photographs seemed to show something about the United States which we had been denying. Evans spoke of a "new" eye. Now in looking at those photographs I am struck both by how much they owe to Evans and how different they are from Evans' work—how awkward, distant, and hostile. Unlike Evans, Frank tried to make the medium do more than it could. As a result his photographs now seem to me to tell more about himself—and at the same time deny it—than they do about the United States. What they see in the United States is important, but it is often confused by the stubbornness of Frank's insistence on his eye as his own.

For Sontag the chief characteristic of photographs is that they are both intimate and distant—at the same time. In short they are promiscuous. But this contrast between intimacy and distance is not inherent in photography: it occurs because so many people take photographs without looking, because they are unable to see. Because she argues

Dr. Raditsa teaches at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against distinctions in quality, Sontag takes average photographs for photography. She does not want standards. In fact she thinks she is fascinated by photography because it appears to deny all standards. This desire to deny standards, to deny judgments of quality is at the heart of much of her work. It is as if she wants to deny what she has missed, as if she wishes to deny that real accomplishment takes hard work—and that some people make good use of their time, others do not.

This insistence on denying values also appears in her writing about illness. She argues against relating serious illness, especially cancer, to character and a way of life and insists, in somewhat guarded terms, on a strictly chemical and biological understanding of the disease. She blames Wilhelm Reich, whose work she has not read with any care, for what she claims is a widespread tendency to assume individuals have a more than unlucky relation to their diseases. Her tone is polemical, assertive, strident. Actually, she is deeply hurt at the ready contempt of some individuals who assume disease tells something about the sick. Easy psychologizing about disease which simply serves to mask an incapacity for compassion when compassion, only compassion, is required is detestable. But Sontag makes it difficult for anybody to have compassion for her, since she cries out against it and accuses everybody—for she can never say anything without applying it to everybody—of assuming that the seriously sick are simply life's losers.

She prefers pity to compassion—pity frightens her less. It confirms her prejudices. Compassion would require her to drop them. It would require her to see with her own eyes rather than with the eyes she thinks she ought to have. Incapable of respect for things worthy of respect—that is what her resentment of values is all about—she has little respect for her own suffering and little capacity to experience her own courage and strength. For her doctors she feels something like gratitude, but even here she masks her feelings in a startling, for her, defense of professionals. Above all she fears to be admired at the same time that she insists on attention—attention she little deserves but, unfortunately for her, gets.

She has suffered but tries to dismiss her suffering in polemic—in a noise of words. There are for her no simple facts—facts are always symbolic of something else. This means that in the end she is always involved in propaganda—in persuading people of something she must suspect is not so.

Because she does propaganda, Sontag's writing presupposes you agree with her prejudices in politics. She makes infrequent but pointed references to these prejudices as matters about which there can be no discussion. Without saying it openly, she is sympathetic to totalitarianism, especially in mainland China. This sympathy for totalitarianism has to do with her refusal to experience values—as if they reminded her of the pain of unfulfilled love.

For her, societies do not differ in kind, only in incidental characteristics: some are rich, some are poor, some industrial, some agricultural, but the fact that in some, men destroy each other, while in others they seek to respect each other, does not make an impression on her and her ever-ready contempt. She refers to capitalism and to classes, as if they were canned goods in a supermarket. She has, however, the modesty to speak of freedom rarely, and not without obvious embarrassment and awkwardness—which she, of course, denies. Her somewhat disingenuous sympathy for totalitarianism shows itself also in her readiness to dismiss the distinction between private and public, without acknowledging that it is precisely the respect for this distinction that, among other things, distinguishes free from totalitarian societies.

At a time when *Le Monde* and some French writers like Jean Lacouture are facing the consequences of their past opinions in the murder in Cambodia, in the concentration camps in Laos and Vietnam, Sontag, who fancies herself a connoisseur of France, does not question herself. She acknowledges the increase of violence and war throughout the world with resignation—as if it had nothing to do with what men (including herself) and governments said and did.

She talks about her visits to mainland China and Hanoi, about buying sneakers in Hanoi in wartime, the way others talk about resorts. At a time when we need to face the recent past quickly, if we are to survive with self-respect, she tries to act as if not much is happening, certainly nothing anybody can do much about, as if she has nothing to do with the consequences of our past irresponsibility. In this refusal to look at herself and the present, she runs away—further into the past: she has the effrontery, in accordance with the until recently mainland Communist Chinese line, to extend her pronouncements about the Vietnam war to the war in Korea and to characterize as disgraceful the American people's "unanimous . . . acquiescence" in the United Nations' readiness to fight in effective support of Koreans who wanted freedom and suffered 1,600,000 deaths for it.

Sontag's poverty of world and self is most evident in her "stories" in *I, etcetera.* They are mostly about robots, and when they are not expressly about robots, the people in them talk and act, rather, behave like robots. In one of these stories, "Old Complaints Revisited," she comes tantalizingly close to facing these robots, to facing the rigidity which keeps her from becoming an artist. It tells of a person trying to see his way out of an unnamed organization that resembles the Communist Party. It is painful, like knowing a person who realizes he has no feeling but cannot yield to the life within him and about him. In this story something beyond her control and expectations almost happens. But she will not let go.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Other stories scrape at real themes: the suicide of a close friend, parenthood. Others parody them—for instance, marriage. But Sontag never lets anything happen: in the end she always has the better of herself. This is because with all her braggadocio, Sontag is guarded, terribly guarded, about what really matters to her. No discretion could match the hesitation of her indiscretion.

Above all, these stories have no feeling. They exist in unacknowledged dread, in dread of modesty, of moderation, and of that simplicity that only comes with love, which marks most serious artists, Godard, Truffaut, Grass. Updike, incidentally flees this simplicity —but, at least, in contrast to Sontag, he knows it's there, always just beyond his grasp.

Sontag goes to the wrong teachers in, for her, the wrong place, Europe, and the wrong time, mostly the nineteenth century. She writes as if she had read everything, but she has not read Paul Goodman, especially his short stories—at least they do not appear in her catalogues and lists. This is too bad, for she could have learned a lot from Goodman. Goodman did a lot of the things Sontag wants to do but dares not. He did them better, honestly, intelligently—and he took his chances. Goodman understood the truth to be uncomfortable. He sensed the flattery endemic to much of our life—which shows itself most blatantly in the advertising, in the "human interest" stories in newspapers. He sensed the dread that smoulders underneath this flattery. I never saw him without being frightened. His stories and some of his prose did that to you also. As a result he still receives the highest praise, from those who do for critics: to be reviled as an "immoral" scribbler after his death (see Joseph Epstein in *Commentary,* February 1978).

Sontag wants Goodman's straightforwardness in her work. But she does not have the courage for it—so she is merely modish, arrogant and contemptuous, self-indulgent. Deeply ashamed, she is resolutely shameless. There is in her work hardly an untoward move—no surprised acknowledgement of an unexpected thought. Her words do not refer to nature or to nature's God, but to "history" which pretends to give us the assurance of philosophy without its depth or its "honest truth"—a beautiful phrase disappearing now from our language without notice, as if men could no longer feel the air they breathe encourage them. For her and the world she insists on as if it were the only one, there is neither property nor friendship nor wealth but only possessions, contacts and money, no self-love but narcissism, no pride but vanity, no intelligence but only brilliance. She is a gang leader, a tomboy, bossy, brilliant but ignorant, willfully ignorant, and, therefore, willfully ugly, fearful of everything (again without knowing it) except emptiness and the confusion of emptiness with assertion. She is afraid of the piercing word that cannot be denied, that is self-evident—which is what Goodman always delivered as an artist, so that there was nothing of the stink of grandeur about him, nothing of the charlatan, nothing of the trickster, but only bare, plain prose reminiscent of Aristotle's love of the world, and his confidence that the soul lived in nature, that reason lived; with always a sentence in each of his stories that glowed with love—and so his art, barren and wretched as it often is, can, in its thirst for plain truth, remind you of prayer.

Neither journalist nor artist nor critic, but a journalist when she would be an artist, an artist when she would be a journalist, and a snob when she would be a critic, Sontag is in business. She is enough of an amateur to make me want to take her seriously. But I cannot. □

Bad Manners as Genius

Richard Price: *Ladies' Man;* Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston.

by Lev Navrozov

The name of the author indicated on the cover is, indeed, Richard Price. But the "novel . . . is narrated" (as the jacket blurb points out) by a fictitious Kenny Becker, a New York door-to-door salesman. In a certain stream of modern American literature, salesmen are symbols (or stereotypes) of smug, coarse Philistinism. Therefore, I cannot very well say, for example, that Mr. Price's text is trite. I read books like *Ladies' Man* only as a reviewer (and enjoy them about as much as a physician enjoys the case histories of obvious and common diseases as told by ill-mannered patients). Yet even I have the sensation that I have read, for example, the brothel ("massage-parlor") scene before *(Portnoy's Complaint?*). At the beginning of the century, a Russian author named Kuprin wrote a novel about a brothel. At *that* time this was at least new. *Portnoy's Complaint* or *Ladies' Man* add nothing to Kuprin (considered a minor author) except a kind of harsh, sterile, "puritanical" ability to make everything inhuman, dead and repulsive. Such books could well be handed out free as tracts to preach puritanism, nay, celibacy, mass suicide, communism or fascism.

No, I cannot say this. The novel is narrated by a door-to-door salesman. Since when are American stereotyped door-to-door salesmen writers or thinkers? Perhaps the fictitious salesman has read a "hell of a lot" of books like *Portnoy's Complaint* and has now churned out one of his own, as hopeless literary hams often do. The more imitative,

Mr. Navrozov, a Russian writer and literary critic, now lives in New York.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

amateurish and generally atrocious the novel is, the truer it is to life, or at least to the literary stereotype of an American salesman.

I have no alternative, therefore, except to refer to the author of the book under review as Price-Becker. Obviously, it is unfair even to single out Price-Becker's book for a separate review. The narrative is a microscopic dot in the vast quagmire of impersonal verbiage published these days as thousands of books under different names. Even a recent Russian emigré in New York has immediately caught onto the fashion and written a narrative, no different from Price-Becker's, except for inessential details.

Once, in search of literary talent, so rare in every country at any time, I read five volumes of the "best American short stories," written around the turn of the century. The collection was a literary desert: no American scholar or bookworm of today knows the name of a single author of a single "best short story." Many stories were about how he/she was going to become wicked, but something happened (the scarlet fever of his/her children) and made him/her good. It was not that these writers were particularly good or sensitive to goodness. It was simply the literary fashion of the day, and literary fashions are the biggest sewage pipes of mediocrity, as a Russian critic said in the '20s. Price-Becker's novel is an impersonal article of fashion. A hundred years ago the Price-Beckers wrote about a sudden scarlet fever which made everyone good. Today they write about a sudden lavatory experience which makes everyone sick and "alienated." A Russian friend of mine was amazed that three different American ladies wrote poems about abortion almost on the same day. "Don't you understand?" I said, "Abortion is today's nightingale. A hundred years ago three such ladies would have all written about the nightingale. Fashions change. Mediocrity, conformity, imitativeness remain."

On the dust-jacket photograph, the author (Mr. Price, I presume, not Mr. Becker) wears a kind of uniform: a zippered leather jacket and a chain necklace. The uniform belongs to the legion of the current fashion. It is odd to expect that the narrative would belong to anything else. It is as standard, impersonal, conformist as the author's fashion uniform. There is a widespread belief in New York literary circles that if, instead of saying "Good morning," one utters a string of obscenities, one is unconventional. Actually, if many are always unconventional in the same way, their bad manners become more conventional than good manners, for bad manners are more obtrusive and reiterative.

In Price-Becker's narrative a boy meets a girl. The girl wants to be a pop singer, though she has no ability (or whatever is required) for this career. She believes the boy *smothers* her. The boy and the girl do their best to disgust each other. She leaves him. This is about one-third of the book. Throughout the other two-thirds the boy visits singles bars and massage parlors, rambles about New York and, at the end of the book, is going to become a homosexual—as predictably as a Price-Becker protagonist a hundred years ago would have been going to become a missionary after his children's scarlet fever.

So what is Price-Becker's book really about? Why have I undertaken to review it?

For the first time in human history there is an enormous number of people who are wealthy (even a New York welfare grant is wealth by the standards of mankind at large), whose material needs are all taken care of by industries and services, and are in good health. Of course, a Mozart would have made good use of such wealth, leisure, care and health. The trouble is that not all Americans are Mozarts, shocking as this cynical revelation might be to some. Indeed, Price-Becker's girl cannot even be a pop singer and Price-Becker cannot even be an interesting conversationalist, let alone a writer at the level of Kuprin.

"He finds temporary relief thanks to a self-massage sex parlor, a sore hooker, and frequent bathroom masturbation. A sympathetic and likeable narcissist."
—*Library Journal*

". . . witty and shrewd."
—*The New Yorker*

"Kenny Becker is a perfectly conceived character . . ."
—*Harper's*

"Price is a powerful populist writer."
—*Village Voice*

"What keeps us reading *Ladies' Man* is . . . Mr. Price's inventiveness as a storyteller and the absolute authenticity of the people he creates."
—*New York Times Book Review*

"Despite the sexual chaos, *Ladies' Man* never seems to go too far, never shocks."
—*Rolling Stone*

". . . a trenchant commentary on ways we [WE?!?—*Chronicles of Culture's* exclamation!] live and destroy ourselves."
—*Publisher's Weekly*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The owner of a New York stationery store I know scrimped and saved all his life to give his children a liberal arts education. His children hate and despise their father's work, for they are sure they are destined to be Mozarts. The fact is that they have no more ability to be Mozarts than their father, their educated airs and graces notwithstanding.

The result is twofold. First, an amateur "literature" (as represented by *Portnoy's Complaint* or *Ladies' Man*) has resulted from wealth, idleness, boredom and abundant paper and printing facilities. Second, many of those wealthy, idle and healthy American middle-class children who have failed even to become pop singers or authors at the level of the *New York Times Book Review* or the *New York Review of Books* are frustrated for life. Mr. Price belongs to the first category, and Mr. Becker to the second. It would, perhaps, be worthwhile to supply every book like Price-Becker's with the following jacket blurb:

> "I am Price-Becker. I am mediocre in everything. I am an ordinary, common, boring New York Philistine.
>
> "But this is not all. There are many men and women who are not singers or writers or musicians, and never wanted to be, but who smile (and men, women and children around are charmed), who laugh (and everyone is in love with them), who gave a dime to the driver of a stalled car to call the mechanic (and everyone is moved to tears). I am not that kind either. I am a New York Philistine who is always totally wrapped up in himself, who alienates, antagonizes and disgusts everyone in sight, and then blames his loneliness and alienation on his wrong upbringing, his heredity, capitalism, commercialism, creeping fascism, the Pentagon, original sin or air pollution.
>
> "So how can I attract attention, love, admiration? With bad manners. True, in the last quarter of a century, thousands of boring New Yorkers, posing as writers, poets, or thinkers, have been doing precisely that. The chance to outdo them is diminishing. Thus, I must use twice as many once unprintable words per page, or, if this is too late, I will be coarser than anyone else. My sex scenes will be more lifeless, crude and repulsive than anyone's, and I will combine them with lavatory scenes, or old-age decrepitude scenes, in such a disgusting way that all my rivals, whether associated with *Rolling Stone, Village Voice,* or *New York Times Book Review,* will gasp and turn green with envy. I will raise even common pornography to the second power of vulgarity, so to speak. Usually people seek pornography as a substitute: pornography poses pathetically as sexual love and tries to imitate its affection, intimacy and even beauty (certainly the porno girls are advertised as beautiful, not ugly). I will make pornography all-ugly, all-revolting, all-inhuman. It will be asexual pornography, so to speak, the pornography of pornography, if you will, the kind of pornography no one would want if I were a professional commercial pornographer.
>
> "I will make myself and whoever comes near me as miserable as possible, I will turn my mind and my life into a cesspool. I will be as disgusting as a human being can possibly be. But this is my only bid for genius, and hence fame, love, admiration. They will say that my book is even more repulsive than *Portnoy's Complaint.* So I must be still greater. I am a man of genius—a new Mozart and a new Thomas Aquinas at once."

Actually, the jacket blurb speaks of Price-Becker "rapidly losing his mind" (a sheer invention, to give it all a "Dostoyevskian touch"), of his "excursion into Hell," his "living death," and the "human instinct for loneliness." Price-Becker himself also drops hints here and there to show that bad manners are abysmally profound, metaphysical, religious.

Emily Dickinson or John Steinbeck were insincere, for sincerity is bad manners. Price-Becker is tremendously sincere. He turns his soul, or at least his viscera, inside out. And what do we see in his utmost depths? "I loved her badly. Madly. She laid her head on my chest and I was in heaven." End of the paragraph. You see how oceanically soulful (or at least humanly normal) Price-Becker is deep within, after one has gotten through pages of obscenities? He is a normal, average human being who can even say normal sentimental commonplaces. Why doesn't he marry a normal, average human girl and stop publishing such occasionally sentimental commonplaces amidst huge piles of ill-mannered trash? What's the problem, Mr. Price-Becker? Just learn how to say "Good morning!" and you'll be all right. Let the *New York Times Book Review* market someone else's bad manners. Besides, remember that as soon as the fashion is over, they will forget even your name anyway. □

Books in the Mail

The Principles of Ethics, Volumes I and II by Herbert Spencer; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis. A discourse on ethics by the XIX century individualist philosopher.

Will America Surrender? by Slobodan M. Draskovich; The Devin-Adair Company; Old Greenwich, Connecticut. A well-documented survey of U.S.-Soviet relations and the possible dangers ahead.

A Public Philosophy Reader by Richard J. Bishirjian; Arlington House Publishers; New Rochelle, New York. An examination of America's political philosophy which includes 17 essays by conservative scholars.

What It Means to Be Human edited by Ross Fitzgerald; Pergamon Press; Elmsford, New York. A collection of philosophical, social and political essays on what constitutes human nature and humanity.

Human Needs and Politics edited by Ross Fitzgerald; Pergamon Press; Elmsford, New York. A collection of essays which examines the concept of human need and its function in structuring government.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Culture Parasites
(and Others Who Still Try to Ask Questions)

Theodore Roszak: *Person/Planet;* Anchor Press, Doubleday & Co.; Garden City, New York.

Robert Jastrow: *God and the Astronomers;* W. W. Norton & Co.; New York.

by Thomas Molnar

Is Theodore Roszak a critic of culture? It is like asking whether Jim Jones was a "reverend" and his sect in Guyana a religion. My question and my parallel are not out of place since the government and the courts indeed hold, or at least imply, that a sect like Jim Jones' is the equivalent of the Roman Catholic Church. When Washington sets up a Department of Education, government and courts will have to maintain that Roszak is a legitimate social critic and that his view of culture is as valid as Goethe's or Matthew Arnold's. We no longer have criteria to distinguish between a monotheistic religion with a high moral content and a delirious gathering of murderous people; similarly, we cannot differentiate between culture and the Roszakian abracadabra, every page of which contradicts the principle of civilized discourse. Thus, the fact that Roszak writes social and culture-critical best sellers is the first proof that the ambience might be beyond cultural repair.

There are other proofs. However, we may deal more coherently with this one, with the Roszak phenomenon, if we group the author of *Person/Planet* with a number of similar writers who are not independent thinkers either, but, like Roszak, symptoms of the age, more exactly, culture parasites, exhibiting the sickness *and* living off its putrefied products. Among these writers let us mention—in order to situate Roszak better—Ivan Illich, Marcuse, and Michel Foucault. This is what they do: they locate the sickness, but in the wrong place, then promote its spread through a systematically defective diagnosis. It is important to grasp the nature of this double sin against truth, since it explains why these men are hard to catch at their apparently honest, serious, and innovative game, and why they enjoy an undeserved prestige. Let me illustrate Roszak's *modus operandi* and show that he is not simply guilty of layers of faulty reasoning, but that he reasons along the lines of a corrupt ideology.

Dr. Molnar is Professor of French and world literature at Brooklyn College.

> ". . . a thought-provoking, brilliant analysis of Western culture—the product of a first-rate, seminal mind. Highly recommended for all libraries."
> —*Library Journal*

The case is trivial, thus typical. The Roszaks have a daughter showing talent for ballet. She attends a poor high school, and her parents wish to register her at a private school with a reputation for excellence. The headmaster insists on a complete course of study, on flawless discipline and no afternoons off from study time even for ballet lessons. Roszak is scandalized at the headmaster's rigidity and changes his mind. But next he is also scandalized by the exacting nature of the ballet class with its strict discipline, allowing for no flexibility of body and for the pupil's untutored inspiration.

Now let us agree that culture consists of myriads of disciplined forms, thoughts and acts expressing beauty, knowledge, accomplishment. Flaubert remarks that he practiced writing *Madame Bovary* by way of accumulating, thus overcoming, difficulties, as, he suggests, a pianist ought to learn lightness of touch: by first attaching leaden balls to his fingers. In a way, Roszak wanted the same thing for his child; yet he refused the modalities, hence the essence, of hard-learned education and performance. He seems to have appreciated the airiness of dance—but refused to pay the price: disciplined effort.

In other words, and this is now generally stated of the content of his book, Roszak acts at each step as if he took for granted that culture is the end product of effort and discipline, yet he demolishes the ideal and blurs the road leading to it. This double or triple layer of false approach—finally, this ambiguity—explains Roszak's and his confreres' success and best-seller status: they advertise the facility of culture and show by example how to live off it.

Let us further illustrate this cultural parasitism through a glance at Foucault's method which is, of course, slightly different. The present French idol—replacing Levi-Strauss, who replaced Sartre, who . . .—has attacked humanism for having focused all attention through centuries on the rational concept of man, thereby formulating culturally epoch-bound definitions for phenomena like folly, education, moral behavior, sexual ideal, as well as their institutional façade. This may be the beginning of an acceptable critique; but Foucault aims really at the destruction of rationality on which institutions and social structures *per se* rest, hence at a utopian situation in which the human image and self-image are dissolved. He is not really an ally against the narrowness of Enlightenment humanism, he campaigns against man.

Or take Arthur Koestler. For years he denounced the ravages of reductionism, roughly, as he defines it, the notion

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that a *whole* is only the sum of its *parts* (a nation: juxtaposed individuals; man: a combination of physico-chemical elements). In other words, he pointed to the danger of scientism as an ideology. However, in other books, and in his new *Janus: A Summing Up,* he tackles the next favorite theme, the alleged disharmony between our "old" and "new" brain, and the alarming result, the preponderance of faith over reason, of the irrational over the rational. Koestler concludes that this dangerous unbalance limits the chances of the human race for survival, and he recommends that we "reorient our emotions so as to bring them in line with reason."

If this is not reductionism, I do not know what the term means. The old story: having found a flawed world, Foucault and Koestler set out to create a new one. Hence their critique is only deceptively directed at reasoned changes, it is projected at an idiosyncratic version of reality, a fantasy image. When, for example, Foucault attacks our too narrow notion of folly, he has no intention of bringing more therapeutic light on genuine mental disease, he labels all of us mad. When Koestler shows dismay at the disequilibrium of the "two brains," he in fact abolishes the specificity of emotions in favor of a crude rationalism. (He enjoys a high reputation among race researchers and biological manipulators.) Koestler's and Foucault's world would be peopled by robots and golems.

Now back to Roszak. His title, a typical sensation-chaser, is supposed to contain a thesis-message: the *person* has *now* a unique chance to disengage himself from encapsulation in rigid institutions and social mores: family, school, work, church, attitudes—because mankind has become aware of a similar encapsulation of the *planet* also, through pollution and other destructive devices. Roszak's smartness (flair for business) consists of turning planet Earth itself into an oppressed minority, next to gays, women and blacks. Once the success-formula is given the rest is easy: recite cases of victimization, and identify the culprit. The victims: person and planet; the culprit: society and vaguely assorted auxiliaries.

It would be pointless to mount a systematic critique of Roszak's book which, as said before, takes its place among the pernicious culture-ideological works of the mid-century, like Marcuse's on eros and revolution, Reich's on orgasm, Sartre's encomia of Jean Genêt, etc. It is better to pick a few points Roszak makes—and misses. The chief among them is naturally the concept of person. Since Roszak, turned for his thesis' sake existentialist, rejects any civilizational category (he calls them "prefabricated slots") into which the amorphous human being must fit in order to become a person, personhood for him becomes everything and nothing, a bundle of indeterminate aspirations, drives, and impulses. It is an adolescent's vague nostalgia for superman. At once, the other favorite term, *culture,* assumes also capricious and blurred contours as the "outlets" and "self-expressions" of the shapeless and drifting *person.* It is an indication of Roszak's snobbishness that after existentialism, he now calls in Mounier's personalism as an honorable figleaf.

Since he works with a defective notion of personhood, Roszak finds that nobody is a person, everybody "plays a role" assigned by society. It does not occur to him that role playing is exactly what civilization and culture are about, and that his daughter, too, wished to "play a role" when, instead of sloppy (natural?)

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

Normalcy—Our Sixth Sense

"Who needs another book on Watergate? Unfortunately, we all do and this is the book. Watergate in a sense was a bloodless coup d'etat, in which the ruler was deposed not by tanks and guns but by typewriters and television. The President endured the ignominy of resignation and many of his men suffered conviction and imprisonment. But we the people did not emerge unscathed. Since President Nixon's abdication on August 9, 1974, we have endured an orgy of self-congratulation by the media heroes of the coup. Worse still is the claim of establishment academicians and pundits that Watergate is a watershed in the history of public morality, that Nixon's men committed unexampled crimes and that the affair must lead us to a new and higher morality."

from "Stans' Stand" by Charles E. Rice

also:

Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus
Waste of Money—The American Scene—Screen
Music—Liberal Culture—Journalism
Polemics & Exchanges

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walking as a spontaneous self-expression, she decided to put certain constraints on her bodily and leg movements. It also does not occur to him that an eventual return to the good savage is now blocked by ethnography which shows that primitives, too, play roles and put on masks (and tribe-imposed behavior) in all of life's important situations: initiation rites, worship, hunting, marriage. Do the women's libbers not play a role, that of the antipuritan, while remaining as puritanic as ever, that is, living according to a new formula, called "lifestyle"?

The tired conclusion inevitably follows: the enemy of the person is society, a nonperson, an alienating machine. Is it run by fascists, capitalists, and establishmentarians? Not only by these, also by their allies: liberals, conservatives, radicals, conspirators all against "self-discovery" (p. 84). The battle line is drawn, on one side everybody, on the other side the person, recently reinforced by the planet. Rid of the rules of reason, Roszak writes now easily and "dialectically": he is against society, locked up in old puritanic forms; the new society will be ethical and esthetic. He is against schools, because they demand discipline, yet he searches for a good one for his daughter. He is against the family, yet finds it natural that a mother gives up her newborn child—to a homosexual who adopts it since he wants to experience what it is like to be a parent (p. 159). Apparently, a homosexual family is approved. Naturally, Roszak is against religion and church, but agrees with some guru that "God lives in you as you" (p. 93).

Thus every institution is restructured, really abolished, like emotions in Koestler's *Janus,* and like folly in Foucault's and Szasz's writings. It would be useless and tedious to explain to Roszak that since institutions are natural to men, in place of the abolished institutions new ones would arise, certainly worse because products not of human interaction but of social engineering. In other words, self-expression would in no time be made to cohere in a program under the ideologue's whip. Cambodia's recent leaders wanted to turn the country into a Rousseauistic idyll —with the help of shovel-strokes on the nape of the neck.

Such facts and evidences have no interest for Roszak, who deals in abstractions like Planet and Person, vague and distant, symbolizing a similarly abstract "emancipation." Anyway, nobody will see through Planet and Person, inexpressive as characters of a Beckett play, the predicament of our culture—just as nobody will be convinced, after reading this book, that Roszak himself is concerned with it. He steps forward as one of the culturally repressed, an inner exile, a spokesman for . . . for one does not quite know what. His own predicament is to have arrived at the tail end of a line of "critics" of a culture they do not understand and of a society they hate. What is there for such men to say if they want to sell books? Their, Roszak's own, culture places him light years below the model of these critics, Nietzsche; and his scholarship is inferior to that of Marcuse or Foucault. He is in a class with Illich and Stephen Larsen *(The Shaman's Doorway),* the class of scavengers collecting the last debris of a civilization, then gratuitously sketching a new one on quicksand.

I remarked before that Theodore Roszak and his best sellers are proof that our culture is beyond repair. It is at this point that something must be said, if not in Roszak's defense, at least as a partial justification for his exasperating shallowness.

The other day I entered my bank. The huge hall was transformed into the temple of Karnak, the imitation marble columns covered with paper imitating stone, including the cracks; overhead bedsheets sewn together were hanging, apparently in lieu of a cloudy sky; painted pyramids and sphinxes were all around, and a four-foot cobra wriggled in the streetside window. I was told that the campaign for more depositors had started with a gala evening of 500 guests, TV cameras and reporters, at which occasion the chief executive rode a live camel, etc., etc. So that nobody should miss the source of cultural inspiration, "Tut" posters from the Metropolitan Museum's exhibit (itself an advertising affair) were all over the place.

This may be "bold and imaginative" advertisement, but it destroys the sense of culture as surely as the KGB's psychiatric clinics destroy the sense of personality. Now the sad thing for Roszak is that he cannot rise to the level of an appropriate critique of such a culture-poisoning—the way Arnold, Henry Adams and T. S. Eliot rose to the level of criticizing their own pseudo-cultural landscape. With all his verbosity, Roszak—let us grant for the moment that his indignation is genuine—is reduced to cultural-linguistic impotence, as he confronts the Karnak on 40th Street, the boss on a camel, and the cobra in the window. So he chooses refuge in some anonymous abstractions. In the process of escape, his cultural imagination is shattered and his critical language is reduced to fluent meaninglessness. And perhaps he is right. Reasoned discourse and culture-reformist attitudes would indeed prove disproportionate; the Person/Planet remains the only reality worth fighting for. It is the camel that Roszak rides.

* * *

I detect behind Jastrow's book the publisher's hand who whispered to the author something like this: vulgar materialism as a fashion is out. The new fashion, even in science, is to bring God, or at least some intelligent design at the origin of the universe, into the discourse. "God is dead" was true in the all-contesting sixties; He is alive again in the seventies, thanks to Solzhenitsyn and John Paul II. Write a text, any text, no matter how repetitious and popularized, and put in a lot of "human touch" stories from the life of great scientists

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

since Einstein (don't go back further, we don't want a history); I shall supply the photographs, of nebulae and men, and the print will be large, with wide space between chapters. We shall call it a book and price it accordingly!

So the ambiguous project to which Jastrow has now contributed, continues: proving God's existence through science. But since science, in the last two, three, four hundred years has been, by and large, mechanistic, deterministic, materialistic, the thing to do is to show that the phenomena are not compact but kind of porous, the electrons behave predictably in their orbits, and the universe is not eternal, it has a beginning, the "big bang." Genesis already said so, and science, that is, Bohr, Heisenberg, Planck, now Jastrow, comes to the rescue.

Nevertheless, I cannot imagine anyone converting just because he cannot determine simultaneously the location and direction of particles. On the other hand, it is true that scientists since the Renaissance have entertained a marked preference for a *soulless mechanism* as the final explanation of the world-all, rejecting the postulate of a *conscious intelligence.* Anything rather than God: the chance encounter of atoms, a very-very-very complex matter in the course of a very-very-very long time, or absolute ignorance, nay indifference.

Jastrow should be praised for proposing, or rather popularizing, the "big bang" theory, the primal explosion which still distributes matter in all directions; but we should be aware that he merely pushes the big question further back and does not ask or answer: from where did the first matter, hydrogen, originate? If it was creation, was it *ex nihilo?* Who is behind it? His other merit is the courage to mention the "religion of science," that is, of the scientists, which too is an ideology with unproved dogmas based on irrational preferences.

I read from the pen of no less than Max Weber that the idea of *ex nihilo* creation was born in the Middle East where peasants were amazed to note plants grow out of the soil fecundated by natural or artificial irrigation. Weber calls this the image of "nothingness" —which only proves that not only physical scientists, social scientists too, have their foolish notions. The peasants most certainly knew that their harvest was the product of a collaboration: the soil, the Nile, and hard human labor, blessed by God. But the peasants, like the workers, like the simple religious man, are hardly ever consulted. □

Guide to an Alternate World

Benjamin Stein: *The View from Sunset Boulevard;* Basic Books; New York.

by Alan J. Levine

Writers have long played with the idea of "alternate worlds," where Lee won at Gettysburg, or the Nazis rule the world, or in some other drastic way deviate from the world we know.

Benjamin Stein has written a lucid, though somewhat superficial, book that examines an alternate world we are shown every day, the one that is presented on television, which, Stein argues, is the dominant communication mode in America.

Stein analyzes much of what we see, though the scope of his work is limited to discussing regular weekly "prime-time" (evening) series. The pretentious dramatic specials and made-for-television movies unfortunately are not examined. A look at them would, I think, confirm most of his important conclusions, but it would force him to modify some others.

Stein finds that most of what we see is manufactured by a group of just a few hundred writers and producers, nearly all of whom live in Los Angeles. To a surprising extent television shows reflect, not an effort to give the public what it wants or is supposed to want, but the fairly uniform and usually silly views these people hold. Television expresses a genuine point of view; it is not just something whipped up to sell cars or corn flakes. And, as Stein shows, it is a mighty peculiar point of view, for the belief system of the people who make television bears approximately the same relationship to reality as *Alice in Wonderland.*

In the real world, a rather disproportionate amount of crime is committed by poor people and blacks, against other poor people and blacks. Crime on television, a staple of the medium, is committed by rich people and businessmen against well-to-do whites. Businessmen are lucky to be portrayed as clowns on situation comedies; on dramatic shows they are usually conspiring against the public interest. Civilian government bureaucrats are stuffy but harmless; the military are thugs, and may be plotting a coup, and perhaps a nuclear holocaust as an after-dinner treat. Small towns are sinister and dangerous, though sometimes, as on *The Waltons,* they may be seen through a dense fog of sentimentality. Cities, though at first sight unfriendly, are comparatively safe and comfortable. Traditional values, Stein observes, are largely inverted. Education and tradition are meaningless. Only villains are modest and think deeply. An odd form of social hierarchy and class prejudice exists, however. "Middle-class people appear generally as heavies or fools. High-class people are always covering up crimes against humanity." (Those crimes are liable to be particularly horrendous if they display any education or culture.) Poor people are almost invariably good, yet, though exploited, they seem to live in

Alan J. Levine is an historian from New York.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surprising comfort. Low-ranking police are heroes, but those in charge are jerks.

Anyone who watches a considerable amount of television can confirm these generalizations. In his interviews, Stein found that the great majority of those responsible for putting these views on the air genuinely believed them. Though quite rich themselves, they did not perceive themselves as wealthy, and were decidedly hostile to those who were. They were more upset by organized crime, and even "white-collar" crime, than by violence in the streets against people. The latter was blamed on "society," or "poverty." Though not hostile to private enterprise, they disliked businessmen, and saw the military as a costly defense against nonexistent threats, small towns as cultural backwaters or strongholds of the Ku Klux Klan.

Stein solemnly notes the discrepancies between television and reality, but he takes a somewhat indulgent view of the television makers. Their oddities, he suggests, are partly due to the fact that they form a rather homogenous, small, nouveau-riche clique and partly to their "apotheosizing of the Los Angeles experience." They are, he argues, a parvenu group that is grasping for power and is hostile to other leadership groups in society as rivals. This explains part of the odd ideology they believe and project. Some special factors enter into this. A majority of writers and producers are Jews, and most of the rest are Irish and Italian. Most came to Los Angeles from New York. Stein found a surprising amount of ethnic hostility to WASPS and other groups they anachronistically see as higher on the social scale—though there may well be some self-contempt at the bottom of this, since Stein reports seeing auditioning performers rejected for appearing "excessively" Jewish or Italian. They are also susceptible to a variety of wild conspiracy theories (Stein says this is common in Hollywood generally): that the Mafia runs big business, that the world is run by big corporations and ex-Nazis, or by eight families, and the like.

However, there seem to be other ideological factors at work. Stein plays down the influence of political loyalties, but it is noticeable that the point of view projected by prime-time television does fit in better with liberalism than with any rival set of ideas. Some of the people he interviewed displayed classic liberal guilt complexes. In discussing the cause of crime, one attributed it to "Frustration and what we in America have done to racial and economic minorities," another irrelevantly brought up Dean Rusk's and Richard Nixon's "crimes" in Indochina. To be sure, the television makers have their idiosyncrasies, such as their obsession with conspiracies, but even these usually feature "rightist" villains. A look at the dramatic specials and made-for-television movies reinforces the impression of a dominant liberal bias. *Collision Course,* the alleged depiction of the Truman-MacArthur conflict, is a good example.

Somehow there are always television treatments (not *necessarily* bad ones) of subjects that are bees in the liberal bonnet. However, anyone who waits for the works of Solzhenitsyn to appear on TV had better not hold his breath.

In other respects, too, television reflects outside influences, principally of other branches of the entertainment industry. Though Stein perhaps rightly argues that the movies now have only a fairly small audience and little direct influence on the populace, television shows are frequently inspired by or copied from successful films—in the last year or so *Star Wars, Animal House* and *The Paper Chase* have all been used as sources for television. As Stein himself notes, the tired and tiresome "small town as evil conspiracy" plot, very common on TV, is taken from a fine 1955 movie, *Bad Day at Black Rock.* Recently the television producers have developed an unfortunate fascination with comic book characters; perhaps they find them intellectually congenial. It is apparent, therefore, that while TV may diverge from reality, that is not because the people who make it are unable to govern their imaginations—they don't have any. They may make exotic adventure shows, fantasies, or science fiction, but they always turn out to be televised comic books, or Harold Robbins in an unusual setting. (Even the highly touted *Star Trek* is only a partial exception to this generalization.) You may be seeing a drama set on Mars, but rest assured; it's really another story of sex and bitter personal conflict in Scarsdale in disguise.

Unfortunately, though Stein notes the perversity and unreality of much of television's picture of the world, he fails to come to grips with the value system underlying it. He notes in passing that, at the time he wrote his book, there were no television shows depicting a complete middle-class family set in the present day. But he does not explore the attitudes towards life and the family that produce such a situation. He limits himself to noting the discrepancy between television and what he likes to call the "folk wisdom" of America. But Stein—like the rest of us—is partly a product of an era dominated by the entertainment industry. When he speaks of folk wisdom, he sometimes seems to mean the values projected by the Hollywood movies of thirty to forty years ago. Possibly these values are less crazy than those of the television makers, but that hardly justifies regarding them as products of an immemorial "folk wisdom." This sort of argument simply distracts from the basic problem of why the television makers feel impelled to invert traditional values and are obsessed with taboo-breaking, and exhibit poorer and poorer taste and standards. But this is not a peculiarity of television alone; the

"... far too narrow-minded."

—Columbus Dispatch

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same forces exist, and are in fact less restrained, in other branches of the entertainment industry, and in fact in our whole culture. This problem cannot be attributed just to the characteristics of a small clique, as Stein argues.

Nevertheless, Stein's book certainly provides food for thought about some aspects of television, though his attempt to explain everything on the basis of the characteristics of the writers and producers is unconvincing. As we have seen, originality is not one of the strong points of the writers and producers; they have to steal many of their ideas, and then beat them to death. Yet television exhibits an amazing degree of parochialism. It rarely strays outside the United States or some limited stretches of American history. The sheer badness of television is due partly to the fact that it is the product of a small group. It does not reflect the talents, interests, or variety of the American public. □

Void Camouflaged by Vocabulary

John Updike: *The Coup;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

by Whit Stillman

John Updike is a practitioner of what must be the dominant literary form today—the unfunny comic novel. In the January 29th issue of *New Leader* a reviewer defines this novel as " 'antic,' which means that believability is sacrificed in the interest of diversity. [The novelist] orchestrates his [book] like a ringmaster at a three-ring circus, constantly sparking the flagging attention of his audience with new acts and daredevil performers. The book is admittedly entertaining in parts, yet only because it is so furiously *au courant.* The humor seldom penetrates."

In the introduction to his collection, *Assorted Prose,* Updike wrote that his original literary ambition was to emulate James Thurber and the humorists of *The New Yorker* school. During the 1950s he did do a series of humor pieces for *The New Yorker* before deciding not to follow Thurber's path. One of the best of these, entitled "Confessions of a Wild Bore," is Updike's first-person chronicle of a compulsive talker's exhilarating inner life.

"Our conversation on the veranda seemed a veritable dance of ideas, counter-thrusts, and graceful laughter," Updike's character says of a party at which he does all the talking. "I was dazzled to think that here, in this specific house on the North American continent, Mankind's tortuous climb toward civilization had at last borne fruit." He rationalizes his compulsive talking as a simple unwillingness to withhold "from my fellow-humans the riches of information and nuance I knew to be within me."

No riches of information or nuance can have been withheld from readers of Updike's most recent novel, *The Coup.* The sharing of nuance has always distinguished Updike's writing; the generous sharing of information has been characteristic of it, particularly in recent years. His interest in the life of President James Buchanan—they were both raised in the same part of Pennsylvania—became the dull, highly informative play, *Buchanan Dying.* His interest in adultery, oral sex and insincere theology became *A Month of Sundays.* His interest in North Africa from reviewing African fiction for *The New Yorker* and traveling there on a Fulbright tour—combined with his interest in adultery, oral sex and insincere theology—has become *The Coup.*

Readers of Updike's new novel are let in on the secrets of the imaginary sub-Saharan land of Kush and its marxist strongman, Colonel Hakim Félix Ellelloû. As a follower of Islam, Col. Ellelloû is allowed to take four wives, which gives the old adultery theme an entirely new dimension.

The novel takes the unusual form of a memoir told in the third person. Col. Ellelloû explains that "a soldier's disciplined self-effacement, my Cartesian schooling, and the African's traditional abjuration of ego all constrain this account to keep to the third person."

Ellelloû's storytelling centers on the last part of his term as ruler of drought-devastated Kush. He is a dictator on wheels, or on foot with the Presidential Mercedes and bodyguard following—the Colonel's conceit is to disguise himself as a proletarian and roam among his people. What North African lore Updike has picked up in his research gushes out in fictional travelogue.

Writing in 1959 of *Poorhouse Fair,* Updike's first novel, a reviewer in the British *New Statesman* commented: ". . . It is too whimsical, it is too much of a stunt. It is too earnest an attempt to get away from the great American terror of the Familiar. And if you escape from the Familiar altogether, you remove those points of reference without which no book can be truly serious."

In design, *The Coup* is such an abandonment of familiar terrain. But Updike's interest in things African and Islamic seems immediately to waver, with Americana, satirically treated, cropping up everywhere. That Ellelloû attended college in the United States (fictional, Midwestern McCarthy College) becomes Updike's pretext for incessant metaphorical flights home.

"A bad idea, scrupulously executed" would be one possible verdict on Up-

Whit Stillman, a former publisher of American Spectator, *free-lances from New York City.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dike's African novel. But bad ideas have turned into great novels. In subject matter and treatment *The Coup* parallels Evelyn Waugh's African novels, *Black Mischief* and *Scoop.* Waugh even displays less knowledge of the region than Updike and seems more preoccupied with home subjects—Emperor Seth's "Oxford progressive" side is his most ludicrous—yet his African novels are masterpieces.

Waugh's satire has the great advantage of being funny. A sample of Updike's comes early in the novel when Col. Ellelloû travels to Kush's border with capitalist Sahel to investigate a looming "pyramid of crates, sacks, and barbarically trademarked boxes. USA USA USA, they said, and Kix Trix Chex Pops . . . there seemed to be barrels of potato chips. Of how this mountain of fetchingly packaged pap had materialized in the desolate *aftouh* of Efu there appeared little trace . . ."

An American diplomat, Donald X. Gibbs, explains to Ellelloû (who is incognito): "This isn't refuse, pal—it's manna. Donated to your stricken area by the generosity of the American government and the American people . . . I've been sitting out here in the underside of nowhere frying my ass off for two weeks trying to contact somebody in authority . . .

"These cats are *starving.* The whole world knows it, you can see 'em starve on the six o'clock news every night. The American people want to help. We know this country's socialist and xenophobic, we know Ellelloû's a schizoid paranoid; we don't give a f—."

But the people of Kush reject the capitalists' gift and set fire to the pyramid of foodstuffs. "We were surprised, how silently he died," Ellelloû writes of Gibbs. Then comes the nuance: "Or were his cries merely drowned within the roar of the ballooning tent of flame that engulfed the treasure heap his writhing figure for a final minute ornamented like a dark star?"

Gibbs dies, but the satire goes on. Under Secretary of State "Klipspringer" is the next American to arrive in Kush. Apparently in Updike's view everyone connected with the State Department speaks the same hackneyed lingo; says Klipspringer to Ellelloû's right-hand man:

"All you need here is a little developmental input, some dams in the wadis and some extensive replanting with high-energy pampas grass the guys in the green revolution have come up with. You have a beautiful country here, basically, and we're prepared to make a sizeable commitment to its future. You tell the man we're very sensitive to the ecological end of things, not to worry. They were worried in Alaska and now they've stopped worrying. The caribou've never been better off. Miracles are an everyday for our boys."

At this conversation Ellelloû is not present (although the novel is supposedly his memoir), but he does get to listen to one of the novel's other moronic honkies, Mr. Cunningham, the father of Candy, Ellelloû's girlfriend at McCarthy and second-wife-to-be. Mr. Cunningham's bigotry is directed exclusively against American blacks:

"Christ, they won't take the jobs there are, they'd rather rake in welfare. Your average Chicago jigaboo, he's too smart to dirty his own paws; if he can't pimp or hustle drugs, or land some desk job with dingbat Daley, he'll just get his woman pregnant and watch the cash roll in."

Oddly, after several pages of Mr. Cunningham's bigoted ranting, Updike remarks on his "quirky bravado" and "desperate wish to be liked." That "Americans wish to be liked" is an insight Updike never wearies of. This old (and probably true) cliché of World War II movie vintage—if not earlier—is put on exhibit as his own brainstorm (the wild bore shares again). Updike's portraits of the American male are satirical—satire of a very low order. The two qualities essential to good satire—humor and exactness of observation—are replaced by a predictable kind of cleverness, if it *is* clever to give senior diplomats of the Nixon administration names which begin with "K" and end with "inger." A weird obsession with the Nixon administration runs through the novel (even the Africans are afflicted) as it runs through so much bad recent fiction, the most recent and egregious example being Joseph Heller's *Good as Gold.*

Of all bores, the least tolerable are those who believe they are funny; in his "confessions," however, Updike is hardest on those who see every conversation as "an immense sieve full of holes crying to be plugged with a sentence beginning, 'In the town where I grew up.' " As it happens, the autobiographical stories that are Updike's finest work could almost all begin, "In the town where I grew up." These are the stories about Shillington, Pennsylvania, where Updike was born in 1932; and about early marriage in New York, unhappy marriage around Boston, and a writer's life all over. They have been collected as *The Olinger Stories, Too Far To Go: The Maples Stories,* and—by far his most charming fictional work—*Bech: A Book.*

In a number of ways *The Coup* is also deserving of appreciation—as a vocabulary manual, as a virtuoso performance, as a hardcover book—but

"Updike takes on the world with the fervor of an Old Testament prophet; the result is an astonishing tale—strong, funny, angry, sly, clear-eyed—that goes right to the heart of the human condition."

—*Publisher's Weekly*

"There is not a sentence in this book I will not gladly read again for instruction and delight."

—*New York Review of Books*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

essentially it is a self-indulgent exercise: trivial in conception and a glittery mess in execution. But, as with many contemporary novels, beneath *The Coup's* surface badness, there is a profound badness.

Paul Elmer More's image of "an explosion in a cesspool" is an effective one for the state of literary fiction in the period since *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has been legal merchandise and a middle-brow "masterpiece" in America. It is too bad that he shot it off at Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer;* the ricochet perforated More and the New Humanist critical program he, Irving Babbitt and Stuart Sherman had advocated. An infusion of New Humanist "classical spirit" might not automatically raise John Updike or Joseph Heller into the literary pantheon. But the reappearance of certain dead critics would still have a "chilling effect" that could be highly positive. Bad novels at least could be rendered less offensive.

But the badness of individual novels transcends the battles of critical schools. Bad novels are all alike in being empty at their core. In Updike's case this odd vacuousness has been disguised by virtuosity, especially in his straightforward autobiographical fiction. The void is camouflaged by vocabulary. In spite of all the theological references, his characters are soulless and unmemorable—including Rabbit Angstrom of the clever name.

However, successful fiction is not just a question of "characters that live." The work must embody a literary personality of its own, not of the author's, but something which is independently coherent. Good fiction is more a psychological than an intellectual achievement. Just how it is achieved remains inscrutable. But should the old New Humanism be worth revamping perhaps Dr. Joyce Brothers should join Plato among its guides. □

How to Wreck a Ruin

Jack Newfield and Paul DuBrul: *The Abuse of Power: The Permanent Government and the Fall of New York City;* Viking Press; New York.

by David Pietrusza

In examining the history of the German Weimar Republic scholars often probe the frustrations of that proud nation over its humiliating World War I defeat and its resultant search for scapegoats. Jews, Social Democrats, anyone connected with the actual signing of the hated Armistice could be blamed.

Such a fall from glory was traumatic, and so too was the bankruptcy of the City of New York in 1975. Proud and profligate, New York fell hard when it collapsed. Those who believed the New York way of seemingly limitless government was morally and financially correct found it hard to stare at the blinding glare of reality.

The authors of *The Abuse of Power, Village Voice* Senior Editor Jack Newfield and former city planner Paul DuBrul possess the stubborn shame of the vanquished. Their dreams for urban utopia have collapsed. They look for scapegoats, although real villains are easy enough to find, slinging pseudo-populist charges around about banks, insurance companies, federal officials, and the Sunbelt. Wrapping up their thesis in the best melodramatic prose this side of Jack Anderson, they hope the public will buy their essays of instant revisionism.

First, though, let us examine where they are on target. The Tammany clubhouse system is not dead; neither is a rich system of patronage and outright corruption. The list of elected officials and party leaders who have been indicted in recent years is staggering—State Democratic Chairman Patrick Cunningham, Tammany Leader Carmine De Sapio, Water Commissioner James Marcus, Congressmen Bertram Podell and Frank Brasco, Queens Democratic leader Matt Troy, Cultural Affairs Commissioner Irving Goldman, Assemblyman Alan Hochberg, State Senator and Judge Seymour Thaler—the list goes on and on in truly sickening fashion.

And there is the matter of police corruption. The famous case of NYPD plainclothesman Frank Serpico and the resultant investigation of the Knapp Commission revealed massive wrongdoing. Incidents of police selling heroin, providing "hit men," selling the identity of police informants to the Mafia were revealed. In a five-year period 300 police officers were indicted.

And, of course, there was the matter of dishonest and misleading bookkeeping which enabled New York City politicians like John Lindsay and Abe Beame to hide the size of yearly deficits until New York's share of the nation's total municipal short-term municipal debt reached a staggering 29%.

Still there is more. The flagrant conflicts of interest that go unpunished; the attorney for the Economic Development Administration who granted 92 eviction notices for a paper company's expansion and three weeks later went to work for them; or the same agency's counsel who negotiated a $22 million no-bid contract for Yankee Stadium Parking and, yes, by the time the umpires yelled "Play Ball," was on that company's payroll.

Incidents like these abound. They are all disgusting. Yet the authors cannot see that such a litany of corruption guarantees a feeling in the reader that pumping federal or state funds into the City is simply dumping money down a rat-hole—and still this is precisely what they want, more money from

Mr. Pietrusza is an historian and a freelance critic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Washington and Albany, more dollars to be put in the reach of outright crooks and incompetents.

Incompetents, the very word to describe John Vliet Lindsay and Abraham D. Beame, the two mayors who presided over New York's demise. Lindsay, the bright hope of 1960s liberalism, was aptly described by Robert Moses when he said: "If you elect a matinee idol mayor, you're going to get a musical comedy administration." Beame was a pathetic figure, small in all manner of statures, vacant and baleful in appearance. In some ways they were antipodal figures, but they both reflected the liberal fiscal policies that New York voters expected—fighting welfare reform, fattening up city employees, pledging money for all sorts of grandiose projects.

Even Newfield and DuBrul can't defend these two—but they can't really bring themselves to attack them for the right reasons either. So they lay the blame at the doorstep of the banks and the insurance companies and the big bad corporate interests.

Over and over again the big money crowd is to blame. Now, I do not doubt that businessmen's motives are sometimes sullied, but to hold either the Mafia or the ruling machine politicians less morally repugnant than major business interests (as Newfield and DuBrul do) is absurd. "It was the bankers who did the hoodwinking—lying to thousands of helpless investors, to the press, and even to the City Hall sharpies . . ." they claim melodramatically, "The true story has taken almost three years to emerge: New York didn't jump; it was pushed."

By this travesty of logic, it was the bondholders and brokers who were at fault for New York's drunken-sailor economy. *They* were the manipulators, even though the nation's investors *lost* $12 billion in the aftermath of New York's semi-default, and hundreds of banks were on the verge of collapse. Yet this is not enough for the authors. They suggest that the bondholders might have forgiven the interest on the debt or stretched the loan out further (how this would encourage further credit for the City or cause it to reform itself is not explained).

This mentality is not too surprising because the entire analysis is transparently Marxist. The city's crisis is not its fault (although only a few other cities like Yonkers or Cleveland have fallen to such straits) it was part of a "national and international crisis affecting the entire capitalist system." They excoriate "those academics who have grown rich preaching the disappearance . . . of the class struggle." They urge a state-run bank, a City take-over of Con Ed, more public housing, greater progressive taxation, and job creation by the federal government "because only the national government has the money to create millions of jobs."

But this is precisely the same blueprint of government that created the mess known as New York City. It would multiply the existing possibilities for waste and graft. Inexplicably, Newfield and DuBrul cannot see this. They are able to recognize that private "monopolies are inherently inefficient; there are no market forces to punish either greed or poor judgment." Yet they cannot admit that the same forces are at work in the state monopolies they so frantically urge.

There are a lot of truly major factors involved in the City's fall which Newfield and DuBrul largely ignore, factors which caused 200,000 jobs to flee over the course of two decades—a "soak-the-rich" tax philosophy that caused New York to be tabbed as having the nation's worst business climate. New York's whole tax structure is not mentioned, its state progressive income tax which soared up to a 15% rate while neighboring states took a one or two percent flat rate, its eight percent state and city sales tax, or the whole series of rules and regulations designed to strangle initiative left among New York's business community.

And what had the taxpayer been squeezed *for?* To provide a level of welfare benefits not only generous in comparison to those of penurious Southern states but also by the standards of nearby industrial states; billions in Medicaid fraud; a once-proud city university system that degenerated into the swamp of open-admissions idiocy; padded bureaucracies with exorbitant pay scales and unbelievable pension plans; a primary and secondary school system that has become a jungle; and a liberal-minded court system with the heart of a social worker and the brain of a gnat that turns vicious muggers and murderers out onto the street time and time again.

In the course of each week I meet with typical New Yorkers around the City's five boroughs, not just in the rarefied atmosphere of Manhattan, but in the middle-class neighborhoods of Queens and Staten Island, and in the decaying slums of Brooklyn and the Bronx. When they speak of their frustrations (and they volunteer them quite freely), New Yorkers now speak of their disillusionment with liberal government—with crime and fear, with giveaway programs that breed hostility and ingratitude, with guilt trips laid on them by liberal pundits who find something wrong in their having earned a decent living for themselves and their families, with federal programs that cost more than they are worth.

Yes, these are the things New Yorkers are afraid of—muggers not bankers, taxes not Wall Street, unemployment not corporate profit. For a long time New Yorkers bought the expensive snake-oil panaceas of big government. Now they are beginning to know better, but if their leaders follow the urgings of head-in-the-sand analysts like Newfield and DuBrul they will never learn the lessons of the recent past. They will order up more of the self-same policies that brought New York to its knees. They will wreck what is left of the greatest city on earth. □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anticolonialism of a Liberated Leftist

James Morris: *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.

by Paul Gottfried

An Imperial Retreat is the third and last part of James Morris' widely praised trilogy on the British Empire, *Farewell the Trumpets.* While the earlier volumes described the process of imperial consolidation, the final book focuses on the end of the *Pax Britannica.* Although the author admits to some sadness in recalling the loss of the overseas possessions that had once belonged to his people, he claims to be able to survey this turn of events "without being regretful." This passage tells much about his view of the Empire. Morris, a longtime correspondent for the *Guardian,* is a man of cultivated leftist sensibility who despises any modern manifestations of European colonialism. He castigates both Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden for their dogged support of an imperial Britain. Elsewhere he chides the "pro-Nazi" positions of South African leaders during the Second World War, while conveniently forgetting to mention that similar anti-English stances were being simultaneously taken by Arab and other Third World nationalists.

In spite of his ideological leanings, Morris seems genuinely impressed by the general dedication of imperial civil servants. And he finds good words for the valor of English armies faced by colonial rebellions, some of which turned rapidly into civil wars once the English had promised independence to the rebels. His narrative, moreover, is consistently lively, the text often sprinkled with engaging stories about prominent colonial families. Morris is particularly fond of tracing the social ascent of old British settlers in various parts of the empire. A visitor to Toronto can learn more about the first families of that former stronghold of imperial sentiment from reading Morris than from all the tours of local historical sites.

According to Morris' judgment, by the end of the Second World War, "it was time the empire went." By 1945, that is to say, the Empire had ceased to have a moral and historical justification; so any attempt to preserve it beyond that point was pathetic, if not perverse. Although the author admits to having softened his own anti-imperialism in the course of his research, he does lend credence, even at the end, to those "who have recognized for the first time that there was cruelty to the conception even in its kindest form." Nonetheless, he cites with obvious approval the observation of Nehru, former premier of India, who credits the British with representing "mighty forces which they themselves hardly realized." He also submits that in spite of "the arrogance of the Empire, its greed and its brutality," this enterprise contributed its "quota of truth toward the universal fulfillment." These comforting assertions about hidden continuities and disguised historical progress enable the members of decadent societies to die with a pretense of dignity, often purchased at the cost of bad faith. While Morris would like to believe that the Empire, in spite of "its brutality," bequeathed British civility and parliamentary institutions to its former colonies, outside of the precarious example of India and, perhaps, a few Third World regimes, his hope has plainly gone unrealized. Indeed, in those African territories now liberated from the British, independence has led not to an enhancement of popular liberties and representative government, but, in almost every case, to their utter extirpation.

Another questionable assumption pervading his work is that the morality of colonialism should be viewed as relative to an historical period. What was ethically defensible in the 1890s has frequently ceased to be so—at least from the standpoint of Morris' spirit of progress. The strongest censures against colonialist arrogance and cruelty, for example, seem to come not at that point where they would most nearly fit, in treating the epoch of imperialist expansion, but rather in discussing the period of British retreat. Unabashed defenders of white European supremacy like Cecil Rhodes are, on the whole, favorably depicted; and even the mass killing of Sudanese rebels in 1898 by the troops of Sir Herbert Kitchener (seeking to avenge the slaying of General Charles Gordon) is simply ascribed to the spirit of the age. Nor need one look far for those sentimental denunciations of the Boer War so characteristic of earlier British anti-imperialists. Although Morris does mention in passing the internment and abuse of tens of thousands of Afrikaner women and children, he also stresses the conformity to "Christian ethics" that supposedly marked the early phases of the British subjugation of the South African Dutch.

And yet, such empathy for the burdens of empire is nowhere to be found when the discussion turns to Anthony Eden's role in the Suez Crisis (Fall, 1956). Suddenly we are faced by a monster of duplicity who trades in "sham victories." The combined Anglo-French invasion of the Suez Canal in the wake of its being nationalized by the Egyptian revolutionary, Abdul Nasser, is made the point of departure for a lecture on the evils of neocolonialism. Eden's decision to regain control over the Canal, and thereby guarantee its international status, is repeatedly attacked as diehard imperialist arrogance. Although Eden and his French allies defended their action as an attempt to protect the com-

Professor Gottfried teaches history at Rockford College.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

promised interest of expropriated Canal Company stockholders and the already violated right of all vessels to pass through the Suez, Morris scorns, without considering, these arguments. The invasion is judged to have been no more than "the last display of imperialist machismo."

It may, perhaps, be a sign of the times that members of Eden's own Tory party made even shriller attacks on his Suez policy throughout November and December, 1956. The prevalence of this defeatist rhetoric in the press and in the House of Commons not only led to his resignation from the prime ministership, but signaled the accelerated retreat of his country from international affairs. "No more neocolonial adventures," has become for Morris and for many of his countrymen the justification for a continuing failure of national will. □

A Valid Defense of the Indefensible

Michael Novak: *The Guns of Lattimer;* Basic Books; New York. *The American Vision: An Essay on the Future of Democratic Capitalism;* American Enterprise Institute; Washington, D.C.

by Christopher Manion

The contemporary reader of Aristotle's *Politics* might well conclude that the *spoudaios*—the truly free man who possesses intellectual and moral virtues which embody a philosophical habit of mind—is up there with the snail darter on the lists of species most likely to be exterminated in present-day America. And Aristotle might join in the observation that the modern American capitalist, the "man of action" submerged in the day-to-day details and specialties of his business, would not be a likely candidate for a life of philosophical reflection and cultivation of the contemplative intellect, which Aristotle considered indispensable for the life of anyone who would not be a slave. The same analysis would apply to modern politics, a world inhabited by technical whiz-kids and pragmatic empiricists, whose only lapses from mechanism occur not in the direction of philosophical reflection, but of romantic wallowing in ideological swamps already littered with the fossils of those who have gone before them.

So, one would not expect the realms of business or politics to suffer from an excess of philosophers; but neither is there any great demand for them. It is the nature of both activities (given our contemporary circumstances) to eschew genuinely philosophical reflection, even as they are governed by ideas —or, perhaps more often, intellectual confusion.

In the past, Michael Novak's works have covered the range of politics, religion, culture and sports. His views reflect a thoughtful, refreshing and often controversial mind, and the works considered here are no exception. They portray two very different confrontations, the one at the turn of the century, the other in contemporary America, and their juxtaposition reveals the intimation of some very correct, even irrefutable observations of our society.

In *The Guns of Lattimer,* Novak examines the clash between a group of immigrant miners in Pennsylvania and a posse of local deputies—and what could be another tired portrayal of "the bosses" exploiting "the masses" becomes a thoughtful analysis of a little-known (and quite ignored) incident in American history. In *The American Vision,* he explores the symbolic language of the anticapitalist lexicon employed by an emerging class of critics whose very success depends on their not being clearly understood. But Novak understands them very well, and his insights into the mind of the anticapitalist "new class," when seen in the light of his portrayal of the ordeal of his people—for he claims them as his own—who suffered at the hands of the Lattimer mine owners seventy years ago, constitute a most intriguing sociopolitical attitude abounding with hopeful possibilities for American self-understanding.

On Friday afternoon, September 10, 1897, at the Lattimer Mines in Pennsylvania's coal country, a posse fired on unarmed miners who were marching to spread support of their strike. Nineteen men were killed, and a sham trial acquitted the sheriff and the members of the posse who had done the killing. Though its proportions qualify it as a tragedy worthy of mention in American history, it has been buried among the footnotes or deemed unsuitable material. Michael Novak, himself a child of Slavic immigrants, tripped upon this "hole in history" and pursued an ambitious program of research to fill it. Most scholars knew little of the Slavic tongue in those days, he explains, and the dead were all "foreigners," many of them still foreign subjects. They spoke little or no English, and were a continual irritant in the more established WASP communities which surrounded the coal fields. "I want my children to have a history," writes Novak. "Though not a historian, I found a gap in history. There was nothing to do but fill the gap myself."

The world abounds with propaganda deploring exploited workers and the inhumanity of bosses; but Novak does not embrace that theme. Instead, he presents a piece of documented fiction which explores the full texture of the life—for it was by no means a mere existence—of the immigrant Slavic miners, the immigrant Irish who had

Mr. Manion, a graduate of Notre Dame, is Assistant to the Director of the Rockford College Institute.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been there a generation longer, and the established society whose roots were over 200 years old.

Ben Sakmar, the fictional miner whose steps we follow around the periphery of the tragedy, bears the sobriquet of Professor Novak's maternal grandfather; and throughout the book we see the escalating series of events through the eyes of the miners, the sheriff, and the townspeople, some of whom would later be among those in the posse. In each case the simple reasoning—and the simple human failings—seems so clear that one wonders how this was allowed to happen. At the same time we see how the miners, with an American flag at the head of their column, expected the surrounding deputies to understand the peaceful, even progressive intentions of the march; but the deputies, urged on by wary mine owners and some trigger-happy bigotries, saw only a rabble of "Hunkies" whose approach menaced property and human safety.

The Lattimer story does not take long to tell; and in reading it again one looks for the telltale signals which might point the finger at one group or another—"guilty!" Instead, we see through the participants' eyes, and no further than they could see; and Novak does not try to fill the gaps with ideological ballast. He explains that he wants to make this reconstruction "a present to the American people"—we receive as a present a part of our past. And indeed we find there "a closer connection between the many suffering peoples of America than we are usually conscious of."

By insisting that we consider the cultural and religious background of Ben Sakmar's people, as well as the frame of mind of the established WASP community in northeastern Pennsylvania, Novak persuasively argues that the Lattimer incident must be placed in a context much larger than that of mere economics or class conflict. In his painstaking inquiry into the events which preceded the strike and the cultural realities surrounding it, he portrays a group of miners who love America, who prefer the capitalism of the Pennsylvania coalfields to the penury and autocracy which they had left behind in Eastern Europe; and an unexpected inference that, for all its faults—for all the Lattimers—capitalism just might be the best possible socioeconomic system. And in the second work we consider here, *The American Vision,* Novak brings his powers of observation to bear witness in defense of American democratic capitalism, presently waging a valiant battle to defend itself in a struggle for survival.

Such a military metaphor seems permissible here, for American capitalism today finds itself under attack from a host of adversaries; and the battle is one of symbols, of ideological missiles hurled by visionaries whose territory, idealistic socialism, is not threatened in return—because it does not exist. Present-day "socialist" regimes are never quite what the visionaries had in mind. And yet, we see no others. And that is part of the problem.

Since before Adam Smith even put pen to paper, social justice, processed into utopian systemic concepts, has been the pipe dream of revolutionary reformers throughout the world. And since classical times, *superbia vitae* has been recognized as a potentially tyrannical element in the order of the soul as well as the social order. The egalitarian dream combines this "spiritual concupiscence" with a romantic inclination of the will to form an ideology so appealing that it has emerged unscathed from hundreds of years of history which unanimously contradict it. And Michael Novak points to the intellectual character of this appeal of collectivism, and the decidedly anti-intellectual *praxis* of American capitalism, as the determinants in the contemporary struggle for persuasion in American democracy. For, while democracy has never been known to survive without capitalism, the greatest danger to capitalism in contemporary America is posed by the war of ideas being waged in the name of "democracy" against the American business community.

Only in a post-Cartesian world could the notion survive that an economic system could flourish regardless of the intellectual and cultural conditions prevailing in society. Yet, "the business of business is business," and American capitalism has been minding the store while the intellectuals—basking in the material plenty provided by the capitalists—have leveled their ideological cannons and taken aim. Novak explains:

> "In the sphere of ideology and ideas, among the artists and intellectuals, as well as among the masses of the world's people, the advantages at present seem clearly to belong to the opponents of democratic capitalism. To a remarkable extent, this seems to be true among many intellectuals within the civilization of democratic capitalism itself."

Long ago Aristotle pointed out that a certain level of wealth was necessary for political activity; capitalism has provided that level of wealth for the majority of Americans (and it is probably true that the very poor in the United States are *not* politically active, but merely *manipulated* by the "poverty activists" of the "new class" in and out of government, whose income level is well above the national average). But Professor Novak points to a fatal flaw in the "rampant individualism" which motivates—and is often motivated by—American capitalism: too often, the bonds of civility, religion, honor and duty are broken to give free rein to the normlessness presented as freedom; and dominant passions can often stray beyond the bounds of "doing your own thing" to run the range of human lusts, including the inclination (seen by Augustine 1500 years ago) of equals to lust for power over their fellow men.

Very well: the battle in a democracy is one of persuasion—not, perhaps, of the majority, but of the key decision-makers in government. And to this end

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the foes of American capitalism, the "new class" of intellectuals whose expertise is control, not production, and whose sympathies lie with the statist mentality, prevail upon officials to remove first one, then another, freedom from the realm of individual action to the realm of government control. Especially by means of the communications media and the "knowledge industry," Americans are encouraged to allow their acquisitive passions—the easiest to please—to win the struggle against their better judgment, which is usually too demanding a disciplinarian anyway.

The soul of America writ small! And as first one passion, then another, gives the new Leviathan his way, American business is slowly squeezed to inactivity, and the golden eggs are increasingly hard to come by.

Novak's prescription will not surprise the regular readers of the *Chronicles of Culture.* American business must mount an intellectual offensive against the glittering visions of the egalitarian romantics—visions that often serve to sugar-coat raw lust for power. Socialism is no longer a mere vision: it is a reality in several corners of the world, and when measured up against this reality, the glittering vision falls to pieces. If liberty *precedes* socialism, it cannot *survive* it. In no existing socialist regime have liberty and democracy persevered. But capitalism cannot develop and flourish unless liberty is *preserved.* Capitalism merely reflects the economic dimension of liberty in our culture. It depends on liberty, and nurtures it as well: all the free decisions which occur in the marketplace contribute to a responsible habit of mind by which the people become accustomed to acting as free men. But in our culture this reality has been taken for granted but never properly understood. So, Novak concludes,

> "The task before business leaders, political leaders, and humanists in the present generation, clearly, is to struggle creatively to bring about that articulation, in profound and original patrimony of free societies. Liberty is our culture's most cherished value. It does not defend itself. It must always be rewon anew. The new class has, perhaps unwittingly, brought us the great blessing of living in a generation that must, for its survival, think freshly and deeply and lastingly. The competition of classes, like the competition of ideas, is the healthy dynamism our society is designed to generate. All benefit by such competition."

The journey of Ben Sakmar from Lattimer to Michael Novak at the American Enterprise Institute invites some reflection. The American system, which produced a heinous attack on unarmed miners at the turn of the century, finds an articulate and persuasive defender in the writer who descends from the victims, whose love for those defenseless and wronged immigrants stirred him to years of effort to "fill in the gap" in history—for his people, for his country. And then, the efforts to resurrect and defend his country. A labor of love, indeed. □

Struggling for One's Own Child's Mind

Connaught Coyne Marshner: *Blackboard Tyranny;* Arlington House; New Rochelle, New York.

by Mahmood Butt

Books on the American educational system have been written from a variety of ideological perspectives, yet there is one common element in all of them. They are "angry books" describing in detail the ills of the compulsory public schooling. There is a general consensus, whether it is Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society,* Max Rafferty's *Suffer Little Children,* or Arthur Bestor's *Educational Wastelands,* that American education has failed to live up to its promise. Schools are not performing their basic task of producing literate, moral and intellectually competent young adults.

Dr. Butt is Chairman of the Education Department of Rockford College.

Hence the concluding thesis of Mrs. Marshner in her book *Blackboard Tyranny* is once again that "public education as it now exists is not only a failure but a nuisance and a threat to the continuance of an ordered society." What distinguishes Mrs. Marshner from many others is her belief that the American system of education is not responding to the needs of the American public, and has come to be arbitrarily controlled by bureaucratic educationists and their allies in the state and federal governments. This alliance has destroyed the traditional local control and sponsorship of education to such an extent that parents and taxpayers have been effectively eliminated from educational decision-making. Parents and taxpayers should embark upon a concerted program of political activism to regain their right to "decide the direction of [their] children's lives," the author suggests.

> "Libraries should have books offering divergent views, but taxpayers deserve better than vigilante manuals filled with sweeping generalizations, half-truths, and hysterical extremism."
>
> —*Library Journal*

Her harshest criticism is heaped on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what she calls the educational establishment and its bureaucrats at the national, state and local levels, and all those whom she disdainfully calls the "amorphous" profession of education.

Mrs. Marshner feels that the Supreme Court, by separating morality from religion, has paved the way for such progressive programs as secular "moral education," "value instruction," "value clarification," secular humanism and situation ethics. These new ways of teaching morality have fostered the view that values are not absolute and eternal but are the outcomes of a process of value clarification and attainment. This "progressive" value theory is blamed by Mrs. Marshner for creating the normless society in America where anything goes.

Whereas Mrs. Marshner's diagnosis may be based on objective evidence, her prescription for the cure is a bit simplistic. She seems to have a nostalgic yearning for the good old days when one-room schools run by solid members of the community taught everything to youngsters interested in learning. Romantic as this notion may sound, it is impossible to recreate. In an age of rapid social, economic and technological change which has created big government, big systems and big pressure groups perhaps this is too much to expect. □

Commendables

Our Serious Past

Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope 1800-1851; **Edited by Eliza Cope Harrison;** Gateway Editions; South Bend, Indiana.

Thomas Cope was a merchant, civil servant and philanthropist. He now provides valuable, even entertaining glimpses into the events of the early 19th century, thanks to Gateway Editions' decision to employ him in this capacity after more than a century. He takes us on summer picnics, shares with us his concern for his family, informs us about his indignation at injustices. It quickly becomes obvious that Cope's major concerns were little different from ours of today. He considered slavery of the body, we contemplate slavery of the mind. He worried about the possibility of a yellow fever epidemic, we fear cancer. But his attempts to understand and evaluate human nature and society, uncomplicated as they were, are as valid today as they were 150 years ago. If a diary contains this kind of ambition, its usefulness and relevance never ages.

Thomas Cope walked in a world where ladies were ladies and gentlemen were gentle men (not all the time). Our natural reaction to such a state of things is a hazy comfort that there was once a time when human beings could deal with their problems without resorting to demonstrations and drugs. Mr. Cope acknowledges that not everyone was happy at all times, but then men and women didn't *expect* to maintain a continuous state of euphoria. It may be that this radical notion is one whose time has come again, though it will have a tough time fighting its way through the cultural patterns that enshrine degeneration as pastime. (BK) □

Simple but Complex Verities

Edward O. Wilson: ***On Human Nature;*** Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts.

By saying, "Man is alive"—we state a given truth which is both simple and abysmally complicated. By trying to explain the life of man as representative of a certain biological species and, at the same time, within the context of a social body composed of many men—we enter a field of knowledge and scientific endeavor called sociobiology. Professor Wilson is one of the most eminent scholars in this relatively new discipline and his book attempts to teach and theorize simultaneously. It is quite a successful attempt, the more so as Professor Wilson's findings, persuasions and conclusions have a praiseworthy flavor of nonconformity and defiance against some of the most obnoxious shibboleths of established, even sacrosanct, intellectual fashions.

The abundance of thought and data in Professor Wilson's book may be a little intimidating at first glance, but one should always keep in mind that human nature is a subject on which each one of us has a very personal expertise; therefore, even the highest scholarly authorities must acquiesce to some sort of parity with the humblest laymen when they decide to identify some verities in this area.

The most refreshing aspect of Mr. Wilson's work is a certain wry and ambivalent antideterminism which quite unexpectedly links existential freedoms and values to mankind's genetic codes, rather surprising for a branch of science so long accused of being derived from mechanistic philosophies. The Darwinian gloom of anthropology and sociology is thereby successfully challenged, and all those who crave a bit of optimism in the future of humanity find Professor Wilson to be a cheerful, though earnest ally. □

Persuasion At Work, Vol. II, No. 5, May 1979:

"HOW GOOD IS THE GOOD NEWS?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Focus

A Fashionable Steel-and-Glass Jacobin Club

Daniel Patrick Moynihan with Suzanne Weaver: ***A Dangerous Place;*** Atlantic-Little, Brown Books; Boston.

by Kenneth Kolson

We all know what Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has to say. And we know to expect him to say it in his inimitable way. Like Lyndon Johnson's "Treatment A," which rarely failed him in one-on-one arm-twisting situations, the Moynihan Treatment, which is performed only in public, is irresistible. Arms oscillating, pencil poking, eyebrows quivering, voice undulating and ejaculating, juices spraying—the world's only 250 pound, splay-legged leprechaun is, when airborne, a spectacle the likes of which has not been seen since the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. And what was said of the Fair may as justly be said of the Moynihan Treatment: as an educational force and inspiration it will do its good "by the exaltation that it will inspire in every man, woman, and child who may have any emotions, and even he who has none, that may come to view it."

Never has the Moynihan Treatment had a more salutary effect than at the United Nations, where it took a furious wind indeed to blow out the pollution left by thirty years of hypocrisy, charlatanry, and brutal intimidation. For eight tempestuous months (can it have been only eight months!), Moynihan, a relentless, blustering bagpipe of moral indignation, employed his incomparable talents to challenge, most audaciously, the tyranny of opinion that had transformed the U.N. from a motley cacophony into a fashionable, and most dangerous, steel-and-glass Jacobin Club.

Ambassador Moynihan's finest hour—indeed the finest hour in the history of the international organization—occurred in the wake of its blackest, most shameful deed: the adoption of the resolution which equated Zionism with racism. The vote was 67 to 55, with 15 abstentions.

When this sordid business was finished, Moynihan took the floor. "It was our speech wholly," Moynihan writes in *A Dangerous Place,* which is part journal and part commentary on his tenure at the U.N. and on the proper place of human rights in our foreign policy, "Washington having had the sense to leave us be." Moynihan opened with words that had been written for him by Norman Podhoretz: "The United States rises to declare before the General Assembly of the United Nations, and before the world, that it does not acknowledge, it will not abide by, it will never acquiesce in this infamous act." As if devoted to single-handedly arresting the failure of nerve that has incapacitated the West even as it gazes into the eyes of its assassins, Moynihan roused his rhetorical powers and unleashed a display of oratory so extravagant, so furious, that the moment is, and will be, remembered as much for the exhibition put on by the Ambassador as for the infamy that provoked it. That was just the point.

The argument of the speech is as compelling as the ostentatious show was awesome. It focuses on the harm that will inevitably be done by the resolution to the cause of human rights. The danger is, first, that the resolution "will strip from racism the precise and abhorrent meaning that it still precariously holds today." This distortion of the language is sure to insidiously undermine the idea that racism is an evil to be vigilantly combated. As political scientist Charles H. Fairbanks put it in a memorandum written for Moynihan's use: "To call Zionism a form of racism makes a mockery of the struggle against racism as the emperor Caligula made a mockery of the Roman Senate when he appointed to it his horse."

The second pernicious effect of the U.N. resolution will be its erosion of those claims on which the independence and the legitimacy of nations now rest. "Today we have drained the word 'racism' of its meaning. Tomorrow, terms like 'national self-determination' and 'national honor' will be perverted in the same way to serve the purposes of conquest and exploitation." When this happens, Moynihan warns, it will be the small nations of the world that will suffer. For "how will the small nations of the world defend themselves, on what grounds will others be moved to defend and protect them, when the language of human rights, the only language by which the small can be defended, is no longer believed and no longer has a power of its own?"

The most profound point in Moynihan's speech is contained in the third threat which this resolution poses to human rights, to wit: "the damage we now do to the idea of human rights could well be irreversible." Moynihan goes on to explain that the very idea of human rights is inextricably wedded to social contract theory; to the idea, hatched in the 17th century, that man is a being who can be conceived of as having lived in a prepolitical state, a state where his rights—if he has any at all—accrue from this national condition and not from his political circumstances. Thus the destruction of this idea—this philosophy in which Western civilization is rooted—means nothing less than the destruction of human rights, because it means the destruction of the *idea* of human rights, just as surely as the U.N. resolution contributes to the destruction of the language in

Dr. Kolson, a political scientist, is a frequent contributor to these pages.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which this idea is expressed. Moynihan observes that:

> ". . . most of the world does not hold with that philosophy now. Most of the world believes in newer modes of political thought, in philosophies that do not accept the individual as distinct from and prior to the State, in philosophies that therefore do not provide any justification for the idea of human rights and philosophies that have no words by which to explain their value. If we destroy the words that were given to us by past centuries, we will not have words to replace them, for philosophy today has no such words."

This is a dangerous book because it is written by a dangerous man who says dangerous things. The danger is that all who read it, as all who have beheld the spectacle in the flesh, will begin to doubt the veracity of what issues from the U.N. today: that Presidents Nixon and Ford were racists, that Cuban troops constitute a stabilizing influence in Africa, that hundreds or even thousands of political prisoners are stashed away in the American Gulag, that Zionism is tantamount to racism. Let those who are faint of heart be forewarned: "the terrible lie . . . told here today will have terrible consequences." □

Waste of Money

Halberstam's Wow! Gee!

David Halberstam: ***The Powers That Be;*** Alfred A. Knopf; New York.

This is Hype-Pop-New Journalism at its best, or worst, depending on what we expect from this contemporary mass-cultural phenomenon, or plague. Mr. Halberstam chronicles chronologically—one demurs at calling his methodology historical—the modern sagas of media empires such as *Time,* CBS, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times.* Even the verb "to chronicle," which denotes a certain writing effort conceived within the realm of creative intellect, seems oddly misplaced when used to describe Mr. Halberstam's endeavors and results. He displays—vividly, to be sure, albeit meretriciously—some people and personalities of America's sociocultural proscenium, but does not attempt to measure them against any idea, any concept, or any moral yardstick of our particular epoch. They seem to form the cast for a giant TV sitcom, starring the tycoons of American journalism. They are presented and judged in keeping with the standards of a Manhattan cognoscente who feeds on the "in" philosophies of fashion, hubris, and rather sleazy variations of liberalism. It does not even occur to Mr. Halberstam, after all his painstaking factual research, to ask what all those Bill Paleys, Kay Grahams and Harry Luces, given all the power he ascribes to them, have done to such fundamental ingredients of contemporary America's *esse* like civic duty, moral principle and freedom. Their impact on man, mankind, truth and human destiny is also ignored. Mr. Halberstam sees in journalism some greatness and momentousness as *Ding an sich;* but his sentiment hardly fits the feelings of contemporary America, which the more she reads her press and listens to her media, the more she tends to see their heroes as "black-hearted scoundrels"—to use Mark Twain's favorite *mot* for journalists. Which, eventually, places Mr. Halberstam's depth of vision and wisdom in the same category as Lou Grant's. □

Delbanco's Strange Dullness

Nicholas Delbanco: ***Sherbrookes;*** William Morrow & Co.; New York.

This is a strangely dull book. Although it sets out to deal with such themes as love, sex, family ties, loyalty, birth, death, roots, etc., the total effect is one of emptiness. In its 250 pages of carefully wrought prose—mostly detailing inner landscapes—the novel manages to evoke few emotions and even fewer ideas. The story has to do with the return of a young man called Ian to his family home in Vermont some months after the death of his father, Judah. Living in the house (referred to as the Big House and set on 1,000 acres) are Ian's old aunt, Hattie, and his widowed mother, Maggie, who, at 52, turns out to be pregnant. The father is not Judah. Nor is his identity of any real importance. What is supposed to be important is the meaning of the pregnancy to the three main characters. Unfortunately, the author provides no reason for anyone else to care. The lengthy musings of Ian, Maggie and the old aunt are about as stimulating as a protracted heat wave—and considerably less genuine. Overcome by feelings of vacuousness, the reader lapses into a semitrance. *Sherbrookes* is Mr. Delbanco's ninth book and concerns the same family he wrote about in an earlier work called *Possession.* (MS)

The Abnormalcy Obsession

John Howland Spyker: ***Little Lives;*** Fred Jordan Books/Grosset & Dunlap; New York.

The jacket blurb describes ". . . [an] astonishing discovery . . . a joyful celebration of eccentric individuality . . ." Actually, the author seems to have gone out of his way to present the reader with an array of the most freakish characters, past or present, that he can find. He takes great care that we know who didn't always wear undergarments and who, it was rumored, "ate his own bogers." Contrary to the jacket blurb's claim that Mr. Spyker is able to sum up lives in a few sentences, all he really

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

accomplishes is to reduce them to a few sentences. These lives seem not so much little as small. Of one woman, for instance, we are told that the only notable thing she ever did was to go for Kosher meat every Friday. Whether she loved her husband, if she had children, was a good cook, whether she was talented in any way—all that he considers unimportant.

What Mr. Spyker considers of crucial importance are his speculations on whether someone was a homosexual or lesbian, the sexual proclivities of his subjects and whatever various perversions he can dig up. If the character is from the distant past and he can find no facts, or even rumors, he simply adds a few speculations of his own.

He seems to be trying to prove that New England, despite its reputation for hard-headed common sense, can rival the West Coast as a haven for weirdos. As he single-handedly destroys the myth of Yankee normalcy, he injects what's repulsive in sex to guarantee his place on the current literary market. Why anyone would consider a mission to hang out one little place's dirty linen for public inspection is a mystery. Perhaps Mr. Spyker himself can tell us: ". . . the Spuycker name, though celebrated locally, is not commonly associated with things of cultural variety," he writes in his book. (BK) □

Nossiter's Veto

Bernard D. Nossiter: *Britain — A Future that Works;* Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston.

At a time when everybody who ever loved things British, from Chaucer to Wodehouse, and from the Garrick Club to Winnie-the-Pooh, returns from England with tearful eyes, Mr. Nossiter, a *Washington Post* London correspondent, thinks that everything is all right and under control. He believes that the visible and palpable ruin of Pall Mall and the transmogrification of Oxford Street into a dilapidated oriental *shuk* are not ruin at all, but the demonstration of the new, laid-back British life style, the English version of the charms of life and civilization as they should be experienced in a post-industrial society that ought to see value in the relaxed pleasures of existence rather than in any strenuous effort.

Near the end of 1978, Anthony Burgess published a novel entitled *1985,* which portrayed Britain a year after Orwell's deadline. The laid-back stance is brought to its ultimate consequences and England is drowning in a limbo of indifference and inhumanity brought about by the labor unions' rule of both the society and human instincts. As firemen are on strike, and nihilism is the official social morality, the wife of Burgess' protagonist burns to death. This has been viewed by the leftish critics in the United States as the author's pure, if unsavory fantasy, when they reviewed his novel in November, 1978. Three months later, in real-life Britain, a giant strike of firemen, sanitation workers and hospital attendants, directed against the social democratic government of Mr. Callaghan, cost several human lives: idle, impassive firemen coldly watched people trying unsuccessfully to escape burning houses, patients died when doctors were forcibly prevented from entering hospitals whose employees were on strike. In the meantime, Mr. Nossiter's book appeared, and the *Progressive,* an American marxist journal, wrote that it ". . . is a stimulating book, and a useful antidote to the diet fed us by the press." If this is how Britain's future works, we prefer her dark, imperialist past. □

Screen

Serious Art

***The Deer Hunter;* Directed by Michael Cimino; Written by Deric Washburn; Universal Pictures & EMI Films.**

by Eric Shapearo

Is *The Deer Hunter* an antiwar movie? The problem starts with the *Iliad.* Was the *Iliad* anti- or prowar? It certainly was against the perishing of the just and the cruelties of fate. It also was sort of pacifistic and internationalist because it evoked the beguiling virtues of serenity and the dignity of diverse origins. But it was also fiercely tribal, patriotic, chauvinistic, macho, and shamelessly in favor of competitiveness and bravery as virtues. It was literary art—perhaps the first to torment mankind with the vicissitudes and incertitudes of interpretation.

The Deer Hunter is the first serious art in two decades to emerge from the Hollywood film boutique. As war *per se* is evil, all art is somehow antiwar. But there are just wars, necessary wars, and wars whose nature and consequences we are unable to decipher during excruciatingly long stretches of history. There's war in *The Deer Hunter,* a war that one cannot dismiss simply with antiwar feelings. *This* war could and should have been won by us—the movie reluctantly conveys *this* message, at least to me. And, I hope, to all those who have already understood some bitter truths. Others who opposed *this* war, and never came to doubt their own righteousness, will only feel reinforced in their beliefs as they leave the theatre. These are the risks of true art.

This movie is a powerful reminder that only art is capable of putting the foolishness of nations into a proper scope. In America of the '70s, a movie on Vietnam was necessary to bare the benighted franticality of the '60s defeatism without showing a single, drug-stoned war protester. When a commu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nist henchman in a Vietcong uniform tosses a grenade into a primitive ground shelter full of screaming Vietnamese peasants, a new perspective opens. The Vietnamese ordeal of communist making suddenly becomes a reality, no less compelling than My Lai. The linkage with the current suffering of the boat people immediately becomes obvious, regardless of the manipulations of American TV, an antiwar medium. And in one's post-show reflections, no one should have any difficulty in crediting these calamities to all the Chomskys and Fondas of this land. The myth of angelic anti-imperialism bursts into an ignoble, technicolor explosion; the panic-stricken howls of children slaughtered by communists fill our ears for a long time.

And it is a true-born prole from Pennsylvania, a working-class Beowulf of Ukranian-Russian origin (to make things more overwhelmingly American) who's busy on screen slaying the Asian-marxist dragon. He is an epic hero with some of Lord Jim's sensitivities, different in nature from the latter's torment, and quite inarticulate to boot, but determining his own id, his commitments, his courage. Here, the mystique of the American melting pot gets its most idiosyncratic display: an Italian-American director in search of a non-conformist, unfashionable revival of forgotten substances, turns to the Ukranian-American community for raw models and value stimulation. An actor of Italian-American descent succeeds in expressing the convoluted reverences for man, life and faith that suffuse the Russian-Orthodox religion and folkloric heritage.

Every bitter controversy in history produces fools. *The Deer Hunter* makes this mercilessly clear. The self-righteous friends of humanness and peace who refused to go to Vietnam, and instead spent their youth listening to fiery speakers with noble idiocy in their eyes, look quite pitiable today—perhaps even to themselves. Michael, the protagonist who went to war and went through hell, comes home with his self-respect intact and his humanness enriched. He's neither a fool nor a victim—which real fools so rabidly want him to be.

Michael is played by Robert DeNiro, the only actor in today's America who can endow primitiveness and inarticulateness, the most common and painful human limitations, with dignity and depth. He transforms a simplistic, but coherent, vision of existence into a code of honor and a sense of value; he's pedestrian, but rich in the endless shades of man's sensibility. We rarely write in these pages about contemporary film actors, for whom we feel an utter contempt: the Redfords, Hoffmans and Nicholsons of today sell the plastic mimicry of ear wiggling as art form; they've lost the sentimental magic of the screen presence of the Gables, Coopers and Bogarts, and they try to make up for it with the trashy mannerism of a "pro," and with an off-screen "conscience." DeNiro is an exception, he still tries to construct the immanence of a person, to portray a person's authenticity not at the expense of his autonomy. This is why he was refused an Oscar this year, Hollywood obviously preferring cloddishness over reticence. This is also why critics devoted to the modish gospel have so stupidly demolished the image he created in *The Deer Hunter:* in most reviews, his character is intimated to be homosexual just because he loves a friend and is reluctant to go to bed with a girl he knows his friend loves. Today's critics do not know how to explain the meanings of emotions other than as sexual disorder. *The New Yorker* went so far as to ask us not to identify ourselves with DeNiro's Michael. Why? Because he is loyal and sane, and does not lose his fundamental wholeness in the face of the worst crucible? DeNiro plows through Michael's low-brow ego with all the inevitable grunts and platitudes of an actor's effort to structure a realistic character, and winds up with a rendition of a superb man. He'll never be forgiven for that by the radical-chic ideologists and movie gurus.

The last scene is a masterpiece of subdued effectiveness, the most poignant message of the picture. The survivors, and those whom they deem friends and relatives, sing an American anthem. It's logical and natural in its lack of affectation. When grief and loss befall people, they huddle around the simplest sense of existence: family, one's own place in the incomprehensibly cruel world, and the country—the last rampart against the riddles of destiny. A cluster of people in mourning clothes sing "God Bless America." There's no bravado in their voices, no triumph, just a resolve to stick to what's dearest to them—familiarity of faces, houses, the heavy steel-mill town's sky. This is the only beloved niche of their being, the simplest of patriotisms. There's no bombast in their singing, just distress and a cry for consolation. But to one Robert Hatch, film critic of *Nation,* once an honorable journal, this sounds different:

> "The scene that really shocked me came at the end, when a small group of the survivors gathered in a neighborhood tavern and raised their voices in 'God Bless America.' Despite all they have seen and suffered they are still true believers, good patriots."

So, Orwell comes to mind, when he wrote that the Royal Navy in 1940 was the only savior of all those British radical dolts who, for two centuries, had debased it as the epitome of evil and had clamored for its destruction. Sad as it sounds, if Americans go to war again, sooner or later, millions of Michaels from mill towns will die to preserve Mr. Hatch's malodorous "right" to feel shocked when he hears "God Bless America" sung by people he disapproves of. And it won't ever occur to Mr. Hatch's framed mind that they will have died for him. And that he's alive and able to scribble his scurrilous diatribes because there still are "true believers" and "good patriots" of this country. Does it make any sense? □

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Music

The Delicate Giant of the Clarinet

Tom Bethell: *George Lewis: A Jazzman from New Orleans;* University of California Press; Berkeley, California, New York, London.

by Craig Wyatt

This is not the first biography of New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis (1900-68), surpassed perhaps only by Louis Armstrong in prominence as a focus of interest in the great endemic music which evolved in New Orleans. Author Bethell defers to Dorothy Tait, who under the pseudonym Ann Fairbairn, wrote *Call Him George,* and even weaves her into his own narrative. But for the most part he keeps to his own purpose, distinct from Miss Tait's: an attempt at a scholarly, rather than subjective, biography and analysis of the music George Lewis and his contemporaries played.

The scholarly detail is a strength of the book, yet also a weakness. Thus we have not only a definitive discography, but entire texts of interviews, by the author and others, and of letters and documents, published and unpublished. We have addresses of houses where Lewis lived as well as played in New Orleans, dates and details of when he played or recorded with this or that musician or band. Some of the selection seems arbitrary and of questionable value. But some of it is illuminating and precious. Thus, Lewis' mother, interviewed two years before her death at age 96:

> ". . . it was Kirby's where he got that little ten-cent flute, and that's where he start. He got that music from that little ten-cent flute, and I never gave him a clarinet. Ten cents, that's all I ever spent for his music . . . Sometimes he drive me crazy. But I wanted him to play because he wanted to be a musicianer . . ."

And Lewis, describing his life during the Depression:

> "I would play till 3 o'clock in the morning at the Kingfish, and then I come home and go to bed; get up at six, and get myself ready to catch the truck to go to work on the WPA. And I work till 2 o'clock every day, or 2:30, and I would get home round three, sometimes I got home later. Then I would eat, and lie down and go to sleep till 6:30, and get ready to go to work. Because at that time dog et dog, and you had to be on your Ps and Qs. If you didn't your job was gone, even though they was only paying a dollar with tips."

By this method the people, the place —New Orleans—and the epoch are evoked. So is the music; one of the joyous surprises here is the discovery of how articulate these musicians were about their art. A long interview with Lewis, particularly enlightening about the music, is included as an appendix. Other material throughout the book thoroughly illuminates the technical and aesthetic content of the New Orleans jazz and, indeed, can guide one's listening to it. An extended commentary by cornetist Johnny Wiggs, who heard the Lewis band play in the mid-40s, not only fixes the character of the music the band played, but the main characteristics of the whole genre: bass player Alcide "Slow Drag" Pavageau's dislike of pianists who played "dischords," the "thick, wide tone" of banjoist Lawrence Marrero, and Jim Robinson's well-wrought solos, which are "nothing but background music. He comes from an era when solos were not used."

Wiggs points out the uniqueness of Lewis, "which is a great thing considering how many clarinet players copy each other." He mentions his "bends, his big, peculiar tone, his curlicues, the very big low register tone he used to get when he was younger—a giant volume as powerful as a cornet—the runs he would play when he didn't know the chord (or it could have been the chord he heard) . . ." This reviewer would only add Lewis' strong sense of tonal as well as melodic counterpoint, his skill in knowing when to weave a line with the cornet in the high register and when to drop to the low register in contrast with the cornet's line.

Bethell has also judiciously included commentaries on the social and philosophical context of what was played by Lewis and his New Orleans compatriots. He correctly sees it as music woven into the fabric of life in the town, with bands accompanying draftees to the train, funeral corteges, playing for holiday parades, dances, and other festive occasions; it was not an abstract or remote art form. It had its roots in European forms and culture abroad in New Orleans' unique melting-pot: its evolution followed the path of declining fortunes for blacks from Reconstruction, through the turn of the century, and into the era when Lewis flourished. Here is one of Bethell's most convincing syntheses: his "revisionist" argument that the music which evolved among New Orleans blacks was not a direct well-spring from the musicians' African cultural milieu, but rather a "liberation" from the European forms. This "liberation" ironically was a corollary of blacks no longer having access to that culture through education and social contact. The music

Mr. Wyatt is art and entertainment editor of the Rockford Register Star *in Rockford, Illinois.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came to be built upon improvisation, not because of a "primitive" ideal, but because the players could not read music and had no formal training. Lewis never learned to read a score, although interestingly in some of the quoted material he uses such expressions as "playing in the staff." And the "liberation" idea is revealingly borne out by the musicians' conscious and unconscious aversion to the blues. Thus William Russell, who made the first recordings of the Lewis band in the '40s, records a conversation with drummer Baby Dodds in his diary:

> "Russell makes the unexpected observation in his diary that the band often seemed reluctant to play the blues. He asked Baby Dodds why this was so. 'You see, it's this way,' Baby replied, 'Our people have been raised with the blues and heard them all their lives,' and went on to imply, Russell said, that they didn't seem so special to black people . . ."

Yet even this music of liberated spirits has its discipline, its canons and rubric. Throughout the book, in quoted passages and in the author's own statements, there are reactions ranging from condescension to disparagement for musicians who could not "fake" (improvise).

Where the author is concerned, this points up a certain weakness of the book: an occasional but irritating parochialism, which is at times merely a quirk but at other times creates distortion. At one point, Bethell haughtily dismisses Vivaldi; at another he berates Aaron Copland and sulks about "the derogatory remarks about jazz he has occasionally made." This observation is inserted in the narrative of the George Lewis-Bunk Johnson band's appearances at the Stuyvesant Casino in lower Manhattan in 1945, some of which Copland attended. In point of fact, this is not only parochial but wrong. Not only has Copland been influenced by jazz forms throughout his career, but at this very time he was presumably delving into jazz forms. Two of his "Four Piano Blues" appeared in 1947 and 1948.

Bethell is also led by his bias to entirely omit all but the most general discussion of Lewis' playing in Europe after the mid-'50s—for this one must read Fairbairn—and he spends an entire chapter grousing about the deterioration of Lewis' sound (and that of his colleagues) in the last years. True, there was the ballyhoo and public adoration, which uprooted and isolated the music. But there were other factors: the musicians were growing old, public tastes were changing (for better or worse), and youngsters who formerly picked up cornets and clarinets in New Orleans now turned on record players and television sets. Perhaps Lewis and his fellows prostituted themselves. But only a dogmatic purist can begrudge them a measure of prosperity and prominence, and us an echo of their unique, dynamic art form.

Notwithstanding the grammatical style which occasionally lapses into the rustic usage of the quoted material, Bethell's work is a useful piece of research for specialists and an equally useful insight for general readers. The main approach to music and musicians is to listen, of course, but books such as this are necessary to create the larger context. By this criterion, this book serves worthily. □

The American Scene

Polish & Irish Jokes

A debate is going on in the sacred abode of our national legislative body on the limits of tax deductions for our selfless public servants. Those pure-intentioned idealists are now clamoring for an additional deduction of $3000 for business (?!?) expenses. Rep. Dan Rostenkowski, D. Illinois, had this to say:

> "The expenses one incurs for serving his country in the halls of Congress far exceed $3000."

Is Mr. Rostenkowski for real? He sounds like an ancient Roman senator, or an antebellum Southern gentleman-farmer, or anyone else who serves his country for free, motivated solely by patriotism, a democratic spirit of sacrifice and other assorted civic virtues. What about the $57,500 that he receives yearly—not counting fringe benefits, perks, freebies, peccadillos, etc.

He was joined by a wailing choir of other mendicants, in both the House and the Senate, lamenting their destitution. The most unexpected—Senator Patrick Moynihan, in whom we saw, till now, a serious man. We were cruelly disappointed when we read his words on the matter:

> "You just simply shouldn't have a Senate that's filled with people worrying all the time about financial reserves and whether they can make it . . . that's not a good situation."

Why should Senators *not* have to worry about what deeply worries 90% of the rest of America? Is this sense of humor prevalent in *our* corridors of power? And who has created this "no good situation" in the first place? Is an indigent Senator's impossibility of "making it" on almost sixty grand a year an Irish burlesque act—or what?

Ideological Center that Would Hold

There is an angry rumbling on the American left, and some of the more impatient circles of organized labor and the radical intelligentsia are working on the formation of an ideological cen-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ter that would constitute an openly socialist option to the meanderings of the Democratic Party—their abode till now. It is going to be called the Progressive Alliance, and it nurses the hope of becoming the Left's think tank, programmed to challenge such rotten capitalistic study centers as the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute. It certainly will have some intellectually convincing arguments to offer, as one can infer from the interview given to the sympathetic *Village Voice* by Mr. William Winpisinger, the President of the Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, the new congregation's guiding spirit and most impressive brain.

Mr. Winpisinger on philosophy:

> "I don't truly believe some of the tenets of Marx or any of that s–t . . ."

On current history:

> ". . . [President Carter] that son of a b---h has lied through his f---g teeth . . ."

On politics:

> "[Jerry Brown is a] f---g idiot! . . . You're at the bottom of a barrel! The son of a b---h is crazy . . ."

On the Brookings Institution:

> ". . . the asinine bulls–t they grind out of there, it's the antithesis of the workers' interests."

On economic theory:

> "You have to have public ownership for the things that are f---g up the system."

The samples certainly inspire confidence that the Progressive Alliance will be a bustling center of robust persuasiveness and refreshingly expressed ideas.

Mrs. Shaw

There's some logic to Miss Patricia Hearst's marrying a policeman. It means she's learned her lesson. To have a bodyguard in one's bedroom may be the best reason for matrimony these days, especially for someone with unpleasant experiences in the realm of violence. If Miss Hearst's choice, whose name is Bernard Shaw, will demonstrate only a fraction of his namesake's intellectual effervescence, Miss Hearst may even be induced to spend her nights at home —a clear benefit for her and her family life. □

Journalism

The Latest Calamity

The Supreme Court has ruled that a person undertaking a libel action against the press is entitled, in a legal proceeding, to ask his/her defamers for what reason the slanderer has slandered him/her. The Gannett News Service immediately labeled it as imposing "a new set of chains" on the press. The president of CBS News called it "another dangerous invasion of the nation's newsrooms," and declared that the journalist had been robbed of "his most precious possessions—his mind, his thoughts, his editorial judgments." A provincial editor exclaimed: "If all these don't worry you, they should!" This, of course, was meant to alert the people of America to the perils of making its press responsible, rational and committed to the common good.

But of late, the people of America seem to think that the American press is committed *not* to the common good but solely to *its own* good, that it has become a Monumental Scavenger feeding on the nation's woes. That is more recklessly self-serving, egomaniacal and money-grubbing than any other segment of the American reality. That from a reporter writing on power, then a power-broker, it has metamorphosed into a ruthless power in its own right. That, posing as just a messenger of the news, it actually *creates* news by faking "uninvolved" or "impartial" attitudes which time and again promote vice, despicable celebrities and common crime. That its fusion of economic and financial power accounts for its nefarious influence upon this society and, in point of fact, works toward its social and moral decomposition.

Thus, the American journalist's mind, thought and judgments, as reflected in *his* capabilities and principles, is nothing America seems to give a damn about these days, and whatever the Supreme Court does to it appears to be just fine. Whatever hue and cry comes from the editorial *Burgs* in Manhattan and D.C., the people are not in the press' corner. Almost 150 years ago, in Copenhagen, when the Danish press resembled the *New York Times* about as much as Hans Christian Andersen resembled Larry Flynt, Søren Kierkegaard wrote:

> "Complete publicity makes it absolutely impossible to govern. No one has understood that better than the daily press . . . quite right; the intention of the press was [always] to do away with government—and then itself govern . . ."

His recognition is more valid today than ever. Therefore, all cheers to the Supreme Court. □

New York Times' Impartiality

A war is being waged in America by those who believe in the SALT agreement as a good thing, against those who suspect it of being a bad thing—politically and otherwise. Certainly, the *Times,* Gotham's reason and conscience, takes an active part in the struggle. So not long ago, the Sunday edition devoted many of its high-priced pages to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the divagations of one Richard Barnet, a senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.

Associated with an institution of this kind and flavor, Mr. Barnet would have been regarded, two decades ago, as a fellow-traveler rather than a senior. The Institute for Policy Studies, as its ample output testifies, is a far-left outfit which sees in America an immoral power with ultra-imperialistic goals abroad and an utterly corrupted socio-economic system at home. Small wonder that his case, as it is presented in the *Times,* rests on presumptions:

—the Cold War was and still is America's heinous attack on the Soviet Union's best intentions to create a world of peace;
—the less military might stored in America, the better for all the good in the universe and mankind on earth;
—whatever negotiations are taking place between Russia and the U.S., it is the latter who is a crook and a cheat who always will try to grossly abuse the Russian good will and the inherent innocence of the communists in power.

Obviously, for anyone with this mindset, things look quite simple: SALT is a blessing, America will try to pervert it, but thanks to the Russian inborn, ideological uprightness, and the infinite wisdom of her leadership, all Pentagon machinations will be successfully thwarted by the Bolshevik forces of light—and peace will prevail over war.

This seems to be the gist of Mr. Barnet's meanderings. It would be beneath the *New York Times'* liberal sense of equity to ask Brian Crozier, General Singlaub, or Hugh Seton-Watson what they think of Mr. Barnet and his opinions, and open its pages to *their* knowledge and views. They could have said, for instance:

(1) That there's no such thing as two very bad, bloodthirsty, war-mongering super-giants, but only one—the Soviet Union—and there's a mountain of evidence to substantiate this, which makes the SALT agreement a shady enterprise;

(2) That we once made a deal with the Soviets, a deal in which we should have little pride, which has let them colonize half of Europe in return for the promise of an established and maintained order all around the world—and even before the ink had dried on their signatures, they nullified their promise in Greece, Berlin, Korea and later in Cuba, Vietnam and Angola, while we never tried to *attack* their sphere of influence anywhere, even if cries for help from Czechoslovakia, Hungary or East Germany filled our eyes with tears —which makes any faith in a treaty with them a highly suspicious undertaking;

(3) That not one of our sacred books asks us to destroy Russia, the Soviet state, or the Soviet political system, while every book taught to children in Soviet schools asks them to devote their life to the destruction of America, its institutions and its people, the killing of whom is presented as a mission;

(4) That insofar as the cause of the proletariat and world revolution, which the Soviet Union claims to embody, is promoted by the Soviet philosophy and poetry, any confidence in such notions as morality, principle and honor in dealing with them is moot, makes any transaction with them an exercise in futility and, ultimately, a disastrous bargain for which our children will have to pay dearly, and we will appear as doleful fools in future history courses.

Unfortunately, the high-priced pages of the *New York Times,* America's premier interpreter of contemporaneity, are closed to such *penseés.* □

Time's Pharisaism (Cont.)

The never-ending saga of *Time* magazine's hypocrisy has been successfully perpetuated, of late, by its story on the CIA. In it, the 6th Avenue temple of self-righteousness and casuistry asserts that tremendous damage has been done to the national interest and that America has become practically blind in a world full of beasts prowling around our almost defenseless body. What *Time* chooses not to say is: Why is it so? Who did it? And how? From the *Time* "essay," an inadvertent reader might get the impression that the demise of the CIA's functionality was brought about by lightning from heaven which struck its headquarters in Langley, Virginia, melted down its ultra-sensitive devices, paralyzed the morale of the spooks and even killed some of them. But it wasn't so. The CIA was done in by the media, of which *Time* is the leading *chevalier sans peur.* And some spooks were actually killed by America-haters in the hysterical limbo that followed the media's anti-CIA publicity.

It all began with one Seymour Hersh, a shady *New York Times* "investigative" reporter who, in the mid-'70s, decided to appropriate his slice of the succulent "go get 'em" journalistic pie. Using Senator McCarthy's method of obloquy and guilt-by-association, Mr. Hersh came up with some "revelations" based on leaks by ultraliberal Capitol Hill operatives. Why he did it—for reckless self-advancement, or other reasons—remains unclear. Soon a platoon of other "revealers," mostly from the ranks of the CIA itself, and propelled by diverse feelings, emerged. They routinely presented themselves as reformers who wanted either to improve the social and moral substance of the agency, or to rectify its imperialistic misdeeds, and as such were mistreated and expelled by the "establishment" or "system." Some of them were born con men whose careers in the agency were not lucrative enough, some—openly procommunist,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perhaps even Soviet agents—came to the ingenious conclusion that instead of penetrating the agency to render it ineffectual and transfer its secrets to Moscow, it would be more useful to destroy it in full public view through lies, fashionable accusations, fantasmagoric vilification, in other words, by launching an anti-CIA witch-hunt which would destroy the very idea of intelligence and counterespionage in America. Both ilks have succeeded beyond all expectation by enlisting the cooperation of the liberal press, of which *Time* is one of the most prominent fixtures. The books of the "revealers"-"reformers" were eagerly published by liberal publishers and touted in the pages of, among others, *Time* magazine, rewarding the authors with money and popularity. The disclosures of the fellow-travelers, which were disseminated with all the American press' talent for overexposure, have made the CIA's enemies in the KGB think delightedly of a leisurely retirement: after all, what they could never achieve, the American media did for them gratis. It has occasionally been rationalized by various columnists that this "openness" was a strengthening process, democracy at work, a salutary effort by the press to "correct" past errors and corruption, and "improve" both the agency and its standing in our demo-liberal society. But the heinous lies and fabrications of both con men and traitors were never publicly verified or rebutted.

So, America is "improved" and "corrected" to the point where its survival is put into question. According to the presslords in *Time,* CBS, the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post,* etc., the media may occasionally err, but even their mistakes have a purifying and beneficial impact on the American reality. This is cant which may cost America a lot, and soon. *Time,* an eager rider in the anti-CIA posse, now laments: "Unless such a change is made, the damage that has been done by crippling the CIA may far outweigh the damage caused by the excesses of the agency when it was riding high and unchallenged," and at the same time, wishes to be regarded by us all as a pillar of democratic decency and wisdom. □

Liberal Culture

Progress and Reaction

What's a progressive?

It's someone who assumes that change as a result of man's inquiry into reality brings improvement. A progressive believes in the ideology of progress, which proclaims that moving from one form of existence to another by social or technological means is a blessing to humanity.

From the dawn of mankind, many have distrusted progress, in both idea and practice. Religions pointed out that only spiritual growth toward God, an unchangeable value, made sense. Philosophers of various schools perceived progress as illusion. Those who told the progressives that concepts and procedures well-tested by time could be more valuable than hasty changes were called conservatives.

For five thousand years there was much evidence that the progressives' claims were valid. No one would quarrel with the progression of the human community from the tribe to the constitutional republic, or from stoning the suspect to the court of law, or from the invention of the wheel to the harnessing of electricity. But by the middle of our century, some mighty doubts had arisen. Our civilization, having so long and arduously perfected the notions of humanness, mercy, compassion and human rights, wound up with Hitler, Stalin, Auschwitz and the Gulag. Our society, having relieved man from obligations and restrictions, became the helpless prey of random violence, senseless crime, vandalism, barbarism and mass neuroses. The progress of science, imposing as it was, brought pollution of air and earth, depletion of nature and overpopulation. And—nuclear energy.

At this point, the progressive's mind, emotions and impulses became hopelessly muddled. He still swore by his faith in progress, but he was up in arms to smash the nuclear reactors, the ultimate in technological progress. Today's progressive has decided to murder his own credo.

The irony is that a cause he would have defended in the past is currently being defended by the same old conservative skeptic who always preferred rationality to starry-eyed rapture but is now attempting to rescue mankind from the fiery utopianism of the progressive. He is doing it because he is aware, as is so frequently true, that behind the noble and altruistic slogans of the non-growth zealots there is more often plain hatred and militant doctrinairism than noble altruism and concern for man's welfare. As of today, the progressive is the one who would put Galileo on trial and Professor Teller on the rack. A curious inversion has taken place: the conservatives are demanding the free exploration of the human genius; the progressives have begun a modern Inquisition.

The outcome of the fight seems to be a foregone conclusion: no one could stop Galileo. Luddites never win. Scientific and technological progress, of which nuclear energy is a part, is a province of the creative élan of the human mind and cannot be *socially* suppressed.

René Barjavèl, a French writer reactionary to the core, wrote a novel before World War II in which he depicted the demise of mankind in a cataclysm induced by scientific progress. Two survivors, the latter-day Adam and Eve, start everything anew, though the founder, conscious of what had caused

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

horror and suffering, vows to eradicate the very notion of progress from the human soul. This forefather has children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and when he is about to expire, his most beloved offspring—an exceptionally bright lad—sketches for him, with a stick in the sand, an idea of a wheel. The patriarch tries to single-handedly strangle his bewildered descendant, but is too old and weak for any effective action and dies cursing the futility of his efforts to safeguard mankind from again doing what it did before and will always do—and calling it progress.

Barjavèl's pessimism is a bit flimsy, but it does put the exertions of the Clamshell Alliance into a somewhat caricatural light. Nuclear energy development is not going to fade away because of the odor of idealistic self-righteousness. Ardent young men will perennially probe into all the antinuclear bigots' lies about what's feasible and what's not. The argument about the dimension of a danger that dwarfs anything known before is ridiculous when faced with what we have known about the conjunction of metaphysics and technology since time immemorial. Humanity has always had to cope with the problems of technological fate: when man invented the lever and his community numbered but five, the first rock lifted in a novel way could well have killed one, that is, one-fifth of *his* mankind, but it did not stop the advance of tools. A death in a plane crash has as much to do with the technology of aeronautics as with individual destiny. Technological progress, by definition, violates anything in its way: by its very nature it encroaches upon any existing reality and transforms it regardless of casualties. No one seems to notice that just repairing the damages of technological progress will always require a lot of technological progress—which makes the current card-carrying progressives look like torpid reactionaries.

The anti- and pronuclear confrontation has, however, still other, and more despicable, aspects. Once again—politics, hubris, anti-Americanism and so-called social conscience promiscuously merge in our streets. The old radical puppet show is in business again. The ugly beautiful people have found a new issue that transmogrifies their cocktail parties into a crusade. Those who see the lowering of the age of sexual consent and ubiquitous pornography as the holiness of progress do not care about jobs or sufficient electricity to cook inexpensive meals—it's not *their* problem. Their problem is how to find a cause that will give them those thrills of lust for the "people's" felicity which they're unable to offer their husbands and wives. The "let them eat caviar if they can't afford hamburgers grilled on solar energy" neo-Marie Antoinette attitude makes Professor Commoner and Jane Fonda their latter-day saints. No one has yet been able to figure out how to run a trillion-dollar economy on sun, wind, ocean waves or mantra recitation, but it is precisely this that is a heady challenge to people who don't have to worry about their children's food and shelter and who have access to the press and airwaves so they may demagogically holler that they are caring for *our* children. The bottom line of their tender emotionalities is that the problem of feeding and clothing 250 million Ameri-

Literature in America

Joseph Heller, the hypersuccessful author of *Good as Gold,* the newest and best-selling exercise in the "Jew against himself" theme, in an interview about his books:

> "My three novels are all so different in spirit, texture and design that they almost defy comparison. *Gold* is the funniest, *Something Happened* the deepest and *Catch-22* the most significant and energetic."

Friedrich W. Nietzsche, a disgruntled German philosopher, rather down on his luck, about authors:

> "The author must keep his mouth shut if he wants his work to speak." □

Books in the Mail

The Roots of Capitalism by John Chamberlain; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis. An examination of capitalism's merits and its role in a free society.

The Ford Foundation at Work: Philanthropic Choices, Methods, and Styles by Richard Magat; Plenum Press; New York. An in-depth look at the procedures and philosophy (and misjudgments) of the Ford Foundation.

My Road to Opera: The Recollections of Boris Goldovsky as told to Curtis Cate; Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston. The memories of "Mr. Opera."

Hilaire Belloc: Edwardian Radical by John P. McCarthy; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis. A carefully researched account of the life and thought of the author of *The Servile State.*

Unto the Generations: The Roots of True Americanism by Daniel L. Marsh; ARC Incorporated; Buena Park, California. A study of some of America's most important documents, from the Mayflower Compact to MacArthur's Address on the Surrender of Japan.

In Defence of Freedom in an Age of Subversion edited by Ralph Harris; Systems Publications Ltd.; London, England. A series of prize-winning essays on the theme "How can a democratic country protect its citizens against subversion without sacrificing individual freedom?"

Before You Lose It All by David A. Norris; Heartland Press; Ames, Iowa. A look at American liberty as defined by the Founding Fathers and the contemporary threats to it.

Forty Centuries of Wage and Price Controls: How Not to Fight Inflation by Robert L. Schuettinger and Eamonn F. Butler; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, D.C. On the effects of wage and price controls throughout history.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cans is no match for the tragedy of the snail darter.

What's most ominous is the behavior of the Institutionalized Hyenas—the American media. Immediately after Professor George Wald pronounced the Three Mile Island accident a holocaust, Walter Cronkite, on the six o'clock news, embraced the superannuated hippies in their musty gear fetched from the attic, and the Vietnam-style *danse macabre avec les placards* had begun. The *sotto voce* enunciations of scholars and experts of doubts about whether any real danger to human life had ever existed in Harrisburg, or that radiation was one thing to science and quite another to the press, were flatly ignored. The media decreed that:

—if the authorities feel confused and sound contradictory in the midst of a crisis, it means villainy, indolence, cover-up;

—big, greedy nuclear business has some cabalistic means to not glow like everybody else in the event of a catastrophe;

—America should believe the panic-mongers of cheap melodrama, and not those in science, industry and government who oppose and contradict them.

This attitude was the signal for an avalanche of antinuke agit-prop literature and the simultaneous suppression of any other point of view. The *New York Times,* writing in the aftermath of *The China Syndrome's* splash, noticed that the nuclear industry's inadvertence was a matter of hypothesis and assumption, whereas instances of the effectiveness, scrupulousness and efficiency of controls abounded. But the *Times'* movie reviewer, in unison with reviewers across the entire press spectrum, exalted the movie as being fully redeemed from falsehood and distortion by its beguiling storytelling. Which amounts to saying that a lie is justified and pardonable if it is told so thrillingly well that the audience accepts it. Moreover, the same *Times* reported that at a press conference in Chicago, a nuclear scientist who was opposed to the movie's message was thrown out of the room by a Columbia Pictures (the movie's producer) public relations man. If it had happened to a spokesman for liberal causes, the liberal press would have given it a front page headline as a grave infringement of the freedom of opinion; in this instance, the incident was not pursued. One Peter Cleary, a Citizens for a Better Environment anti-nuclear scientist, wrote in the *Chicago Tribune:*

> "Accidents in 1970 and 1971 at Commonwealth Edison's Dresden reactor were used as the basis of the film *The China Syndrome.* In real life, of course, the accidents did not go as far as they do in the film."

But the same *Chicago Tribune* headlines a Harris Survey dramatically: "Concern over Atom Growing," although the report, in smaller print, describes "the unwillingness of a 57 to 40 percent majority of Americans to declare a moratorium on nuclear power," while "by 68 to 29 percent, a majority would 'allow nuclear power plants to be built . . .' " The same paper's movie reviewer, enthusiastic about *The China Syndrome,* asks rhetorically: "Do films have an obligation to be fair?" —as if oblivious to Goebbels, who once said: "Truth is a degenerate Jewish invention to contaminate the nation's will," or Lenin, who wrote: "Truth is what serves the proletariat." The *Chicago Tribune* hack seems unaware that unfairness in arts is a sin against both truth and art; he advocates "socialist realism" for the American culture—and we are afraid that, unwittingly, he has thus become the spokesman for the American media on this issue.

Therefore, the fundamental question is: Why should we believe those who are against and not those who are for?

Comment *continued from page 5*

raneé, the largest bordello empire on earth, some new, intertwined political potentialities become obvious.)

In the end, it's all a strange, if not tragic, contradiction of democratic capitalism. Why, at its most advanced stage, does it still remunerate with money, work, thrift, enterprise, innovation, reliability and courage in economic life, while, at the same time, lavishly granting fame and millionaire wealth to vulgarity, destruction, sham, wickedness, lies, expediency, obsequiousness to fads, stupidity, meanness, bestiality in culture? In short—why does it reward the ugly beautiful people with exorbitant success? It was not always thus; as it stands now, capitalism is, in the long run, the loser, in spite of some instant bonanzas for the record companies and TV corporations. With the help of a perverted First Amendment, which was not conceived as a privilege, but as a principle of mutual obligation, an insidiously mighty group exploits a bogus populistic rhetoric in order to accrue immense wealth and use it to corrupt the American culture. The only real title to populism is the sharing of people's historic condition and needs. Nothing is further from that than the multibillion dollar entertainment industries run by the ugly beautiful people who fraudulently claim solidarity with the American people. Since the liberal culture that backs them is by now a dogmatic orthodoxy, anyone who opposes them must be branded as reactionary, redneck, low-brow, yahoo, etc. Which, in turn, makes a merciless struggle inevitable.

—Leopold Tyrmand

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rockford College Institute
Rockford College
5050 East State Street
Rockford, Illinois 61101

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED